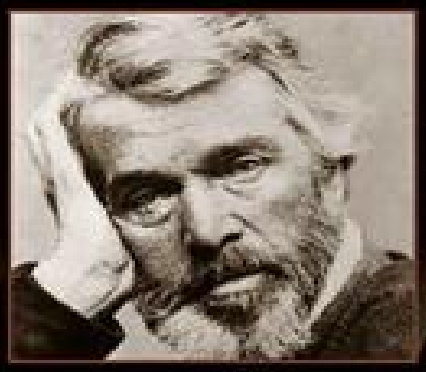
# THE PROPHETS OF DOOM

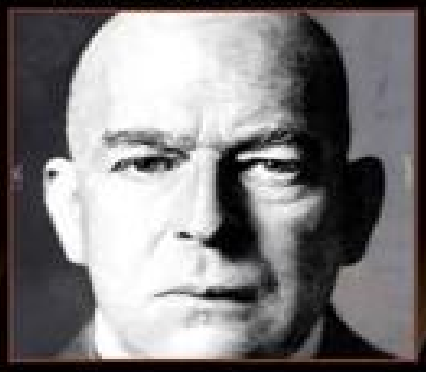
Giambattista Vico

Arthur de Gobineau



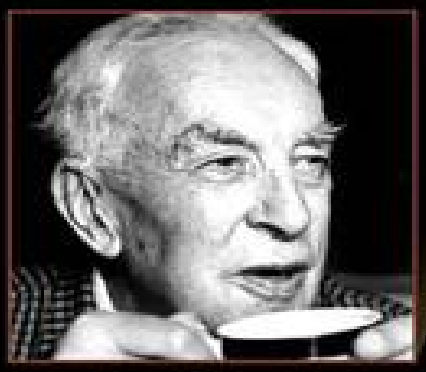
Thomas Carlyle

Brooks Adams



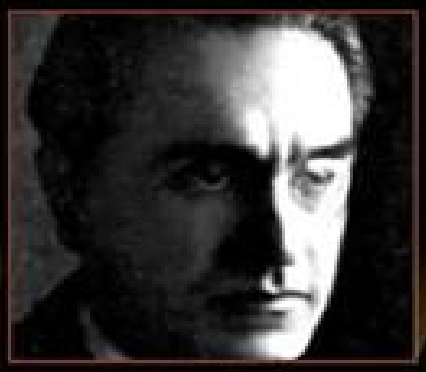
Oswald Spengler

Pitirim Sorokin



Arnold Toynbee

John Bagot Glubb



Julius Evola

NEEMA PARVINI

- Front Matter
  - Title Page
  - Publisher Information
  - Also by Neema Parvini
- The Prophets of Doom
  - 1: Linear and Cyclical History
  - 2: Giambattista Vico
  - 3: Thomas Carlyle
  - 4: Arthur de Gobineau
  - 5: Brooks Adams
  - 6: Oswald Spengler
  - 7: Pitirim Sorokin
  - 8: Arnold Toynbee
  - 9: Julius Evola
  - 10: John Bagot Glubb
  - 11: Joseph Tainter
  - 12: Peter Turchin
  - 13: Conclusion
- Back Matter
  - Bibliography
    - Primary Authors
    - Secondary References
  - Also Available

# The Prophets of Doom

**Neema Parvini**

SOCIETAS
essays in political & cultural criticism

imprint-academic.com

Published in 2023 by
**Imprint Academic**
imprintacademic.co.uk
PO Box 200
Exeter EX5 5YX
United Kingdom

Digital edition converted and distributed by
**Andrews UK Limited**
andrewsuk.com

Copyright © 2023 Neema Parvini

The right of Neema Parvini to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without express prior written permission. No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted except with express prior written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended). Any person who commits any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damage.

The views and opinions expressed herein belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Imprint Academic or Andrews UK Limited.

# Also by Neema Parvini

*Shakespeare's History Plays:*
*Rethinking Historicism (2012)*

*Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory (2012)*

*Shakespeare and Cognition:*
*Thinking Fast and Slow through Character (2015)*

*Shakespeare and New Historicist Theory (2017)*

*Shakespeare's Moral Compass (2018)*

*The Defenders of Liberty:*
*Human Nature, Individualism and Property Rights (2020)*

*The Populist Delusion (2022)*

# *1: Linear and Cyclical History*

> Now the darkness only stays the night time
> In the morning it will fade away
> Daylight is good at arriving at the right time
> It's not always gonna be this grey
> All things must pass
> All things must pass away.
>
> —George Harrison.[1]

On 27 September 2005, Tony Blair, addressing the Labour Party conference, said, 'I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalisation. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer. … In the era of rapid globalisation, there is no mystery about what works: an open, liberal economy.' For Blair, Progress—capital 'P' Progress—by which he means both technological and social change in the directions he favours, are inevitable. For him, then, as today, the debate is over. 'We have won the battle over values,' he declared, 'the challenge we face is not in our values; it is how we put them into practice in a world fast forwarding to the future at unprecedented speed.'[2] On the day I am writing these words in 2022, Bloomberg has recently reported that the UK could be facing blackouts and gas cuts in the coming winter (in the event it was only soaring energy prices),[3] inflation has hit a forty-year record,[4] the *Daily Mirror* ran the front page 'RETURN TO THE DARK AGES',[5] after which Liz Truss became the shortest serving UK Prime Minister in history, and, across the Atlantic, hundreds of Republicans and leading political commentators are branding the USA a 'banana republic' after the FBI raided the home of Donald Trump, the former President and likely Republican candidate for 2024.[6] This would have been world-shattering stuff in eras gone by, but it is just another news cycle in the current year, all of which will likely be forgotten about by the time you read this.

Contrary to Blair's hopes, his friend, Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock, who manages over $10 trillion in assets, declared that Russia's invasion of Ukraine under Vladimir Putin 'marks the end of globalisation'.[7] A recent poll of Americans found that 73 percent believe the USA is on the 'wrong track',[8] with a similar poll in the UK showing that most Britons are also

pessimistic about the future.[9] Things can only get better! Or so Mr Blair told us in 1997. Today we are quite accustomed to believing that things can also get a lot worse. So-called Progress, for example in women's rights, has not resulted in people being happier. The phenomenon is so persistent, long-standing, and widespread it even has a name: 'The Female Happiness Paradox'. Even as women have made incredible gains in workplace equality, earnings, appointments to leadership roles and so on, their happiness has declined on every conceivable metric—including anxiety, depression, fearfulness, sadness, loneliness, and anger—since 1970.[10] Men are not faring much better. The male suicide rate is at an all-time high.[11] Experts and the priests of Progress puzzle over how it could be that men and women now are less happy than their 1950s counterparts, who after-all did not have smartphones, computers, Netflix, and, in many cases, television sets or indoor toilets. We might wonder again, as Christopher Lasch did in 1991, 'How does it happen that serious people continue to believe in progress, in the face of massive evidence that might have been expected to refute the idea of progress once and for all?'[12]

In writing this book, I hope to answer a different question: if today we instinctually reject the technocratic progressivism of Tony Blair, how else might we view the shape of history? Are there viable alternatives to progressivism and, if so, what are they? What impact does conceptualising history in a distinctly 'non-progressive' way have? In every age, there have been thinkers who might broadly be described as *Prophets of Doom*. This does not necessarily mean that they are pessimists, but rather that they reject the notion that history is an inexorable march of improvement. History is not, in their view, a line on the graph going up and up 'to infinity and beyond', but a recurring pattern of rise and fall.

Each chapter of this book will cover a thinker who thought seriously about the shape of history in a way that challenges the dominant paradigm of Progress. The present chapter will sketch the main currents of thought about historical patterns from the ancient world until the eighteenth century. My survey proper, starting in Chapter 2, will span from 1725 to the present for two reasons. First, the notion of Progress has only realistically existed in a recognisably modern form from the eighteenth century, so it makes sense to start from the Counter-Enlightenment. Second, I wish to consider, as much as possible, those writers who can speak to the developments of recent history that we typically call 'modernity'. For these reasons, the

appropriate starting place, in Chapter 2, is Giambattista Vico (1668–1744). Chapter 3 will focus on Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Chapter 4 on Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), Chapter 5 on Brooks Adams (1848–1927), Chapter 6 on Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), Chapter 7 on Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968), Chapter 8 on Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), Chapter 9 on Julius Evola (1898–1974), Chapter 10 on John Bagot Glubb (1897–1986), Chapter 11 on Joseph Tainter (1949–), and Chapter 12 on Peter Turchin (1957–). Chapter 13 will form a brief conclusion. I will thus cover eleven thinkers: three Britons (Carlyle, Toynbee, and Glubb), two Italians (Vico and Evola), two Americans (Adams and Tainter), two Russians (Sorokin and Turchin), one Frenchman (Gobineau), and one German (Spengler). While there are as many disagreements between these thinkers as there are similarities, taken together these are 'the Prophets of Doom', because they each share a belief in the inevitability of civilisational decay and eventual collapse.

Before surveying the important thinkers that precede my featured authors, let me make a few notes about this book's method and scope. The eleven men listed above all published large volumes of material and led (or continue to lead) long and storied lives. They led armies, dined with Presidents, were sent on diplomatic missions to exotic locations, and influenced some of the most impactful figures of recent history. As fascinating as such details may be, my concern in each case must be limited to how these men thought about the shape of history and how they might help us seriously posit alternatives to the notion of Progress. As such, I will not be concerned with the minutiae of their various biographies beyond the briefest of outlines to give a flavour of who they were. Also, I cannot hope to capture the entirety of their respective corpuses in this study as most of these authors wrote copiously. In most cases, I will focus chiefly on a 'masterwork': *The New Science* (1744) by Vico; *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853) by Gobineau; *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895) by Adams; *The Decline of the West* (1926) by Spengler; *Social and Cultural Dynamics* by Sorokin (1941); *A Study of History* (1954) by Toynbee; *Revolt Against the Modern World* (1934) by Evola; *The Fate of Empires* (1976) by Glubb; *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1988) by Tainter; and *Historical Dynamics* (2003) by Turchin. In the case of Carlyle, who lacks a systematic treatise of this sort, it will be necessary to range across multiple works to draw out his ideas about the shape of history.

In every case, I will consult a wide range of secondary scholarship, but the aim in doing so is for clarity rather than critical analysis or evaluation—although as we go on the authors will start evaluating each other and this may call for some adjudication on my part. Some authors will require greater space than others. Such is the ambition and scope of the respective works of Spengler and Toynbee, not to mention the body of secondary literature on them—and their general centrality to this topic—that regular chapter lengths could not do them justice. While all these authors make important contributions, Spengler and Toynbee are the twin pillars of civilisational history such that no subsequent author can even touch the topic without evoking their names in some way. I am less concerned with whether this or that author was accurate in their history, this is a matter for *Notes and Queries*, but rather with the overall pattern they inferred from their studies. Neither am I concerned by such nonsense as reputations and fashion. In 2011, Niall Ferguson wrote, 'Hardly anyone reads Spengler, Toynbee or Sorokin today',[13] these writers are 'monumentally unfashionable',[14] whether that's still the case over a decade later is irrelevant other than to say that, if people are not reading these authors, then they should be. I do not seek to develop my own historical model and this book is written chiefly in a value-free descriptive mode rather than a diagnostic one. What I do hope to do is to pull out the common threads from this diverse range of thinkers to identify what, if anything, can challenge the dominant progressive paradigm and the complacent received 'wisdom' of our epoch.

While it is not necessary to read my previous book, *The Populist Delusion* (2022), to understand *The Prophets of Doom*,[15] it should be noted that I take for granted its scepticism about both liberalism and democracy and its view that 'the character of society … is above all the character of its elite; its accomplishments are the accomplishments of its elites; its history is properly understood as the history of its elite; successful predictions about the future are based upon evidence drawn from the study of the composition and structure of its elite.'[16] The key point in stating this—perhaps startling to some readers who have been taught to think of democracy as an unalloyed good, the notion of elites as an unalloyed bad, and of history as being driven by bottom-up rather than top-down processes—is to grasp that I do not see any great social advance or 'progress' in the democratisation of power. This is because, as is the thesis of my last book,

in practice democracy is not only a delusion but also impossible. Power necessitates an organised minority ruling over a disorganised mass and, if 'elected', represent neither the will nor the interests of 'the people'. Liberal democracy provides a smokescreen for the ruling class and obscures the real mechanisms of power with the lie that 'the people' are sovereign: they are not and never will be.

While every system of government shares the principle of minority rule over the disorganised mass, liberal democracy practically *ensures* that there will be no moral unity between the rulers and the ruled and that there will be group conflict at a societal level, while other systems at least provide the possibility for such unity. This is, incidentally, a rearticulation and distillation of elite theory whose best known exponents were Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels. *The Populist Delusion* expanded the field to take in insights from Bertrand de Jouvenel, Carl Schmitt, James Burnham, Samuel T. Francis, and Paul Gottfried. As we will see, these few statements, which are sceptical about democracy, are self-evident to many of the writers under study since such scepticism has been the historical norm. We live in the aberration. *The End of History* did not materialise and will one day be regarded as a self-contained epoch that started in the direct aftermath of 1945 and will end at some point in the future, during which some great things were achieved and during which most educated people took leave of their senses.[17]

Let us turn to understand the sorts of theories of history that predominated before the eighteenth century, and to draw out some commonly recurring patterns and themes in them. The remainder of this chapter will briefly outline some of the most important thinkers from 750 BC to the 1700s. For most of recorded Western history, there have been two competing views of the shape of history. The first is inherited from the Ancient Greeks, reaching its most famous form in Polybius (200 BC–118 BC): the idea that civilisations rise and fall in cycles like the seasons. The *Anacyclosis* was developed from Plato (428 BC–348 BC) and Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) but finalised by Polybius in *The Histories*.[18] It held that there are three types of governmental constitutions—monarchy, aristocracy, democracy—which each degenerate into a tyrannous form before giving way to the next in sequence as pictured below.

'The description of the *Anacyclosis* is based upon two primary concepts': the sequence of the constitutions and the idea of a society as a

living organism. ‘The sequence is monarchy, kingship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy and ochlocracy, illustrating the three simple forms of constitution and their respective, symbiotic corrupt forms. The other primary concept is the biological paradigm of genesis, growth, acme and decline, a pattern which all living matter was seen to exemplify.’[19] After the complete cycle has finished there is a return to barbarism—a very common theme in cyclical history—and the entire process starts again. Among many others, both Cicero (106 BC–43 BC) and Niccolò Machiavelli (1496–1527) followed Polybius almost wholesale in adopting the *Anacyclosis*.[20]

The Polybian *Anacyclōsis:* Combining Patterns and Biological Change

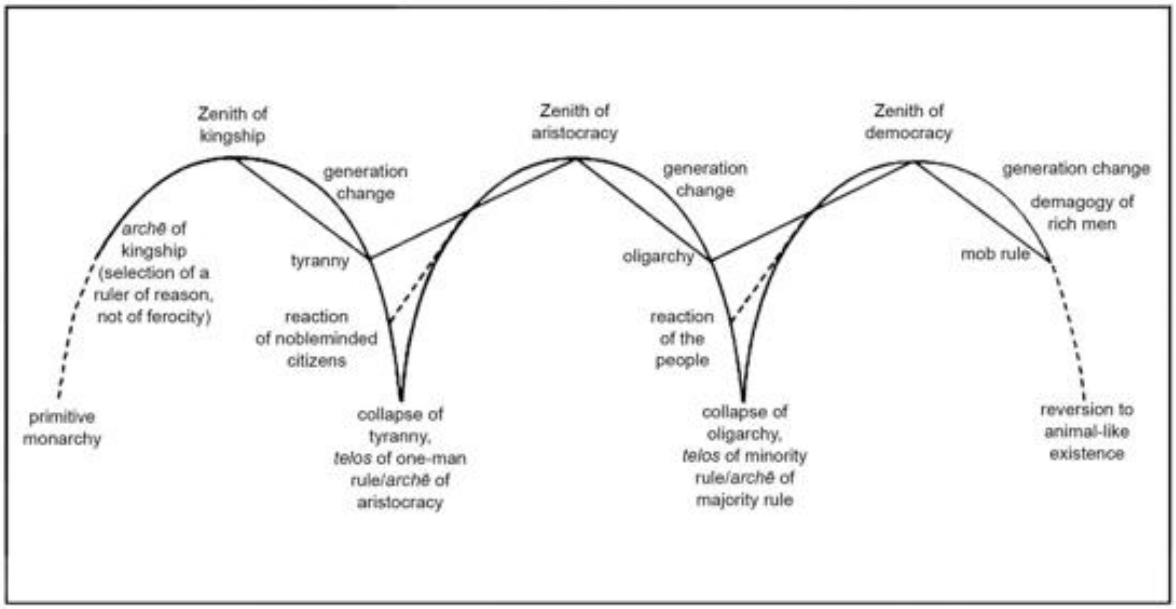



*Figure 1.1.*[21]

Given its enormous importance to the history of ideas and to history itself (since the Romans were so obsessed by it that it affected their real-world decisions), it is worth briefly outlining Polybius’s *Anacyclosis*. Polybius starts his analysis in the aftermath of a great catastrophe ‘such as flood, famine, and crop failure’ which necessitates the natural instinct of people herding together to mediate weakness and the natural emergence of a leader ‘with exceptional physical strength and mental daring’. This is what Polybius calls ‘monarchy’ which takes place on a small scale—it is perhaps

better to imagine a tribal chieftain than a king. It becomes ‘kingship’ only when the complexity of the society has grown to the level at which there is a need for law, justice, and morality. In these circumstances, the attributes necessary for a strong leader change from the merely martial: the community requires someone wise. ‘The criteria they use to choose their rulers and kings are no longer physical strength and forcefulness, but excellence of judgement and intelligence.’ The community will protect such a king ‘however old he gets’ due to his years of morally sound and judicious rule. However, after the initial few generations, and especially after adequate food and shelter are secured, the kings degenerate from judicious wise men to decadent types who dress and eat in ‘distinctive and elaborate ways’ and pursue ‘total sexual freedom’. This eventually so disgusts their subjects that the kings become unpopular and must resort to tyrannical measures to maintain their power. They are eventually overthrown by a consortium of ‘high-minded and courageous men’ who establish a ‘new era of aristocracy’. However, after a few generations, the same problem rears its head once more: the aristocracy forget their obligations, forget the struggle against tyranny of their forefathers and dwindle into a ‘rapacious and unscrupulous money-making’ oligarchy prone to ‘drinking and the non-stop partying that goes with it’. Once again, this breeds popular resentment, and the citizens institute a democracy to rule themselves—now equating, from recorded memory, kingship with tyranny and aristocracy with oligarchy. However, by the third generation, the direct memory of oppression under oligarchy begins to fade: ‘the principles of freedom and equality were too familiar to seem important, and some people began want to get ahead of everyone else.’ The public appetite itself becomes greedy and the elected government, ‘finding their own resources and merits were not enough … squandered their fortunes on bribing and corrupting the general populous in all sorts of ways.’[22] And now the unlimited appetite of the public generates its own form of communistic tyranny:

> For once the people had grown accustomed to eating off others’ tables and expected their daily needs to be met, then, when they found someone to champion their cause—a man of vision and daring, who had been excluded from political office by his poverty—they institute government by force; they banded together and set about murdering, banishing, and redistributing

> land, until they were reduced to a bestial state and once more gained a monarchic master.[23]

And thus, the *Anacyclosis* begins again.

However, before the *Anacyclosis*, the Greeks had another cyclical conception of history as a series of declining ages following Hesiod (750 BC–650 BC): Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron, with an intermittent 'Heroic Age' between Bronze and Iron which coincides roughly with the time of Homer.[24] The extent to which Hesiod intended these ages to be cyclical as opposed to linear is disputed,[25] but they are nonetheless widely seen as both borrowing from, and as being in continuity with, the mystical cycles of Eastern myth and tradition as well as the four seasons. Whatever Hesiod's intentions, subsequent thinkers, especially the Stoics and the Romans after Seneca (4 BC–56), treated the Four Ages as cyclical. There is a remarkable closeness between Hesiod and the ancient Persian Zoroastrian conception of history, which also followed the metallic theme, as well as the Four Yugas (Ages) of the Hindu doctrine.[26] Hesiod's ages are also captured in the Bible, specifically in the Book of Daniel where, in a dream, Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon sees a statue: 'The image's head *was* of fine gold, and his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, / His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay' (Daniel 2:32–33).[27]

> In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod relates the degeneration of man's history down from the distant Golden Age of Cronos to his own pernicious Age of Iron. It is a synchronic paradigm of human history, a 'steady declension of nature', in which men decline in moral character and fortune from the first to the final period. His story links the 'good old days' of Cronos to the golden period of Eastern lore which like it, also is followed by succeeding periods of silver, bronze and iron, into which he inserts, however, an anomalous Heroic Aeon in an attempt … 'to idealize [sic] the life depicted in Homeric times'.[28]

In this, Hesiod was followed by Plato and the later the Stoics, although they eliminated the Heroic Age or else combined it with the Bronze Age. The Iron Age, in which Hesiod saw himself, is 'a time of social revolution, when all existing institutions are in collapse, the established order is toppled and confusion reigns with no visible hope for the living.'[29] After total

collapse, a Golden Age will come once more, and the entire cycle starts afresh.

Hesiod operates at the poetic level of myth and mysticism, later historians such as Herodotus (484 BC–425 BC) and Thucydides (460 BC–400 BC) treated their subject matter with a more critical, rational, and systematic eye. These can be seen as intermediaries between Hesiod and Polybius:

> As well as writing a description of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, Herodotus and Thucydides also 'discovered' something remarkable. They both believed they had recognized a cyclical pattern in history. Herodotus's history, for instance, reflected a repeating pattern of rise, peak and decline. We see this pattern in his descriptions of both people and states, for example the tyrant Pisistratus and Athens, King Croesus and Lydia, and Darius and Persia: their fortunes rose and fell. Herodotus considered the cyclical pattern to be the basic structure of history: 'For many states that were once great have now become small, and in my lifetime those that are great used to be small.'
>
> Thucydides also contended that the rise and fall of Athens and its disintegration during the Peloponnesian Wars had parallels with other historical periods, and believed that the cyclical pattern was analogous to human nature and therefore could even serve as an 'aid for interpreting the future'. This vision of the future, present, and past as an eternal cyclical pattern can of course also be found in the works of the Pythagoreans, Anaximander, Parmenides, and Plato (Timaeus), as well as in the Greek tragedies. The new element in Herodotus and Thucydides is that they believed to have recognized these cyclical patterns on the basis of their methodical principles. Herodotus found the pattern in the lifes of people and states through source comparison, while Thucydides found the cyclical pattern through eyewitness accounts.[30]

Thus, from the Ancient Greeks we have the cycle of the Four Ages from Hesiod, the basic pattern of rise and fall from Herodotus and Thucydides, and the *Anacyclosis* from Polybius.

The extent to which the Greeks and, later, the Romans held *to all these cycles simultaneously* can be reconciled by the fact Hesiod describes more general *historical* cycles while Polybius describes more specific *political* cycles and Herodotus and Thucydides describe a basic shape for each cycle. We might think of the *Anacyclosis* as micro cycles taking place within the macro cycles of the Ages with every individual cycle following the pattern of rise, peak, and decline.

The second view of history in the Western tradition is linear and inherited from the Bible and Christianity, which asserts a definite beginning and end to the world. To make matters more complicated, at times, the Greco-Roman cyclical view and the Christian-linear view have coalesced, as we will discuss, which is confusing because they should be mutually incompatible.

> The problem of linear or cyclical order is of peculiar importance in Western civilization after St. Augustine because we have compounded the Greco-Roman apprehension of the cycles of life and of seasons with the Hebraic conception of history from the creation to the last judgment. There is a contradiction between the idea that all events recur in never-ending cycles and the idea that each life and even each event is unique and can never recur.[31]

To confuse matters even further, some scholars, most notably G.W. Trompf, have warned against 'too sharp a contrast between these two views': 'the old contrast between Judeo-Christian linear views of history and Greco-Roman cyclical views', he said, must 'be seriously questioned'.[32] Nonetheless, he acknowledges that:

> …there exists a widely accepted contrast between the Greco-Roman cyclical and the Judeo-Christian linear approaches to time and history. It is often contended that one great legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition was the straight-line view of history, the view that history ran from Creation and God's first covenants with man to the future eschatological fulfillment of his promises. The 'Greeks' or Greco-Roman ancients, by contrast, even when they write of catastrophes and cosmic conflagrations, are taken to acknowledge no such final and unrepeatable events. It is often supposed that theirs was a cyclic view of history, that they insisted on the eternal return of what had been before, while the Hebrews 'thought the sequence of historical events' to be 'a purposive movement towards a goal,' something 'non-recurrent, non-reversible and unique.'[33]

It is not difficult to see how the linear Judeo-Christian conception of history can lead directly to a theory of Progress. The cumulative structure of the Bible lends itself to such a view: 'The Old Testament was in its entirety considered a historical document containing an evident notion of progression. The events of the history of salvation anterior to Christ fell naturally into discrete periods: Adam to Noah; Noah to Abraham; Abraham to David; David to the Babylonian captivity; the Babylonian captivity to Christ.'[34]

Progress is, as Christopher Lasch put it, 'a secularized version of the Christian belief in Providence'.[35] He takes this idea from Carl Becker, for whom 'the idea of progress … is to be understood as a secularization of the millennialist interpretation of history.'[36] The qualification of 'millennialist' is important because this denotes a particular Protestant strain of thought which is nearly entirely absent from the time of Augustine in 426 to the 1500s. The millennium in question concerns a period of 1,000 years mentioned in the Book of Revelation (20:2–6) in which Satan is bound while Christ reigns until the last judgement.[37] There are many denominational disputes over the precise ordering and meaning of these events: does the second coming precede the millennium, in which case Christ literally reigns on Earth, or does Christ reign figuratively through the church until His second coming and the last judgement (which take place at once)? We need not concern ourselves with these disputes other than to note that Augustine essentially collapsed the millennium, the second coming, and the last judgement into a single event, the Apocalypse, and this view has held firm in the Catholic Church to the present day.[38] However, various Protestant sects from the 1500s, and especially those associated with The Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s in the American colonies, revived millennialism and conceived 'human history' as 'the work of redemption, a work which could be completed with the second coming of Christ and the establishment of his millennial kingdom.'[39]

Becker provides a neat definition of what we typically mean by Progress:

> The modern conception of progress rests on the belief that man can, by taking thought, add a cubit to his stature, or else that a cubit will be added whether he takes thought or not. It rests upon the assumption (1) that nature operates uniformly; (2) that man is, in some measure at least, the product of nature; and (3)

> either (a) that man can, by mastering the secrets of nature, shape his own destiny in harmony with his desires, or (b) that a natural process of evolution will inevitably lift him, whether he wills or knows it or not, to ever higher levels.[40]

Becker, summarising the arguments of J.B. Bury, argues that the linear Christian view of history, by itself, was insufficient to generate the theory of Progress, which is said to be 'impossible' before René Descartes (1596–1650), Isaac Newton (1642–1727), and John Locke (1632–1704):

> Classical thought was incurably pessimistic with respect to the future possibilities of the human race, conceiving that there is no new thing under the sun and that 'time is the enemy of man?' Medieval thought was equally pessimistic about man, conceiving him so little capable of progress or improvement that it had to bring in Providence, and the specially designed machinery of Church and Empire, to save his soul alive out of hell. The modern idea of Progress was therefore impossible until the Cartesian and Newtonian philosophy established the notion of uniform natural law, and Locke's criticism of innate ideas seemed to make man the product of an environment that could be modified and indefinitely perfected with the increase of scientific knowledge. The great aim of the eighteenth century was to shape the ideas, the conduct, and the institutions of men in harmony with 'nature'; that is, to discover, by reason, as Voltaire thought, or by consulting the instincts of the heart, as Rousseau thought, or by studying the customs and institutions of men, throughout the world and in the past by all of these means to discover those ideas and institutions that were most universal and hence most in accord with the 'nature' of man.[41]

We can draw a straight line from this to all future manifestations of progressivism from Karl Marx to Tony Blair.

However, implicit in the above passage is the fact that the medieval Christian view of history was both linear *and* pessimistic. The chief source of this pessimism was Augustine of Hippo (354–430):

> Perhaps the most influential periodization schema derived from biblical narrative was that known as the Six Ages of the World. In the late third century, Sextus Julius Africanus advanced an early but unorthodox version of this schema, asserting that each age equaled a thousand years, and thereby predicted the Second Coming of Christ around A.D. 500. Augustine, a century later, put forward his own division of the Six Ages of the World and, in response to Julius, made a point of declaring the duration of the 'sixth age' unknowable. History, then, remained part of this undifferentiated 'sixth age,' a true 'middle age' (medium aevum) from the first coming of Christ to his Second Coming at the end of time.[42]

The First Age is from Adam to Noah; the Second Age is from after the flood to Abraham; the Third Age is Abraham to David; the Fourth Age is from David to the Babylonian exile; the Fifth Age is from the founding of the Second Temple under Cyrus the Great until the coming of Jesus Christ; the Sixth Age is from after Christ until the Apocalypse. Thus, according to Augustine, history as we live it today and have lived it for past two thousand years has played out entirely in the Sixth Age.[43]

> When Augustine asserted his Six-Ages-of-the-World schema, he set it alongside the Six Ages of Man, claiming that the world grows old and, like man, gets worse over time. By the fourteenth century, this birth-maturation-death paradigm was thoroughly ingrained into medieval thought.[44]

This is the schema behind, for example, the famous 'All the World's a Stage' speech in *As You Like It*—although it should be noted that William Shakespeare puts it in the mouth of Jacques, a malcontent, suggesting that such sentiments—at least when taken as the life of a society rather than for a individual—were seen to be somewhat gloomy by 1599. Augustine's model is pessimistic because the Sixth Age represents a downwards trajectory of life getting worse and worse until the final release of the Apocalypse. For example, Otto of Freising (1114–1155), a twelfth-century bishop, who follows the Augustinian model in *The Two Cities* (1146) believed he was living in a time of decadence, 'already failing … drawing

the last breath of extremist old age', and looked at prior eras as times of valour and virtue.[45] The *Two Cities*, a schema taken directly from Augustine, refer to the City of God and to the City of Earth, or what Otto tends to call the 'evil city'. The City of God refers to the divine or transcendent, it is otherworldly, and offers the possibility of salvation to the faithful through the church. However, the City of Earth refers to all that is temporal or worldly and all those who have rejected the City of God. The City of Earth, says Otto, has three stages: 'the first is wretched, the second more wretched, the third most wretched.'[46] The only way out of this is through devotion to God, which can be achieved either as a warrior by joining the Crusades or as an ascetic—in other words, a monk.

The Greco-Roman cyclical view was dormant for much of the medieval era and the Middle Ages, but stirrings of it remained in Britain, especially in the work of the Venerable Bede (637–735) and, later, Geoffrey of Monmouth (1095–1155).[47] Their alternative tradition to Augustine saw the providentially guided deaths and rebirths of nations in the Bible as a basic pattern for all of history. The cycle is 'judgement–retribution–restoration'. In the Bible, this cycle is most explicitly outlined in the Book of Jeremiah. The book starts with a judgement. The prophet Jeremiah confronts the people of Judah about their wrongdoings: unfaithfulness, rebellion, waywardness, transgression, heedlessness, taint, corruption, profanation, shamefulness, stupidity, self-interest, greed (Jeremiah 2–6).[48] The people of Judah have not only descended into sinfulness but have taken to worshipping the idols of Baal and burning their children as offerings to this false god (Jeremiah 19:4–5). God forsakes them and vows to destroy Jerusalem. God's divine will does not act directly but rather through people. In this case, retribution comes through the figure of Nebuchadnezzar II and the Babylonians (Jeremiah 39:1–10).[49] God 'wills the city devastated and has evoked Babylon to do that task'.[50] The First Temple is destroyed. But Judah is not only materially devastated but also its people must suffer a period of exile (to Babylon) and their rights as God's 'chosen people are now suspended'.[51] Restoration comes, however, when God judges the Babylonians, finds them wanting, and accordingly terminates His alliance with them (Jeremiah 50:31–2).[52] God's new agent is another Great Man of history, 'Cyrus the Persian', who is 'mobilized … to defeat Babylon'.[53] Under Cyrus the Great, the period of Babylonian captivity is ended (538 BC), the Judeans return to Zion and, eventually, under Darius the Great, the

Second Temple is constructed (515 BC). The Judeans' status as 'chosen people' is restored for another six hundred years.[54] Note, here, how a secular and temporal understanding of these events would see the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Judah as well as the rise and fall of Babylon and the rise of the Persians, but the Biblical understanding sees the cycle of judgement–retribution–restoration with God providentially acting through certain Great Men such as Nebuchadnezzar II and Cyrus to enact the different phases of that cycle. Using this pattern, both Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth could later consider 'the great sweep of history, the rise and fall of peoples and dynasties' in a way that 'does not replace providential history'. History is 'a series of cycles of rise and decline, symbolized … by Fortune's wheel' but nonetheless always guided by God acting through people.[55]

However, these cyclical models of Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth are generally perceived to be idiosyncratic and interesting departures from Augustine, whose linear Six Ages model of history remained overwhelmingly dominant until the 1520s. Augustine's dominance was first threatened by the enormous influence of Petrarch (1304–74), who practically invented the view that he was living in the Dark Ages which were only to be lifted by a Renaissance. 'Rather than a linear historical pattern from the Creation to the end of time, Petrarch believed he could discern a new pattern: Antiquity–Dark Ages–New Age, corresponding to the later well-known periodization Antiquity–Middle Ages–New Age.'[56] This pattern marks a significant departure from prior cyclical patterns we have seen because Petrarch introduces the notion of *revival* into his schema: the idea of looking back to the classical era for inspiration in the present.

> Petrarch saw a hope of temporal resurrection, namely through the rediscovery of classical Rome. After a prolonged visit to Rome in 1341 for his coronation as poet laureate, Petrarch asked a correspondent the following question: 'Who can doubt that Rome would rise up again if she but began to know herself?' Rome, in this case, referred to pagan and not Christian Rome, as Petrarch affirms in the same letter, drawing a boundary between what he considers to be ancient and modern history. Unlike the classical age of Rome, Petrarch believed the time in which he lived to be one shrouded in darkness, a 'middle squalor' suspended between two 'happier ages.' The

> darkness (*tenebrae*) that for the medieval person was characteristic of the pagan times preceding Christ, described for Petrarch the Christian times in which he lived.
>
> In the final lines of his epic poem Africa (1338/9), Petrarch emphatically conveys this *tenebrae* along with his ardent hope for a classical revival: 'My life is destined to be spent 'midst storms and turmoil. But … a more propitious age will come again … Our posterity, perchance, when the dark clouds are lifted, may enjoy once more the radiance the ancients knew.' In contrast to the Augustinian birth–maturation–death topos, Petrarch offers an alternative tripartite paradigm of birth–death–rebirth, one which can be equally imposed upon or extrapolated from events in the biblical narrative. So, even though Petrarch, in celebrating pagan classicism, introduced historical divisions to the ahistorical 'sixth age' his periodization schema still resided within the Judeo-Christian framework.[57]

Here we can see at once that linear history does not necessarily mean progressive and that cyclical history does not mean pessimist. In the fourteenth century, the cyclical view adopted by Petrarch represented a more optimistic view than the linear view inherited from Augustine. Note also that Petrarch essentially extends Augustine's Sixth Age indefinitely to contain many cycles of birth-death-and-renewal within the broader linear framework—although it could be speculated that this was one way of disguising his crypto-paganism in a form acceptable to Christian dogma.

It is worth noting that around the same time Petrarch was writing, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) developed a robust cyclical view of culture and history hundreds of miles away in Cairo. There are two key features of Ibn Khaldun's work that would later prove influential. First, his recognition of what we would call today 'in-group preference' or 'group feeling' that helps keep a people, community, or nation together —we will see something of this when we come to consider Gobineau in Chapter 4 and it has been particularly influential on Turchin, who is covered in Chapter 12. 'A group with high [collective solidarity] will generally win when pitched against a group of lesser [collective solidarity].'[58] Second, his theory of accumulated knowledge: that each new civilisation grows out of the ashes of the last

one[59]—we will see something of this in the theories of Sorokin and Toynbee in Chapters 7 and 8. This second idea has at least a superficial similarity to Petrarch's worship of the Roman era in the late Middle Ages. There is, however, no evidence that Petrarch and Ibn Khaldun had any knowledge of each other.[60]

In Europe, it took almost two hundred years for Petrarch's view to dislodge the Augustinian one. 'It was not until Polydore Vergil's *Historica Angilicae* (1534) that a logical, scholastically recognized defense of the birth–death–rebirth model surfaced in northern Europe. Polydore, in this work, adheres to the same life-cycle paradigm of Augustine but provides one notable caveat: he explains that nations, unlike human beings, are not restricted to a single lifetime.'[61] This effectively 'resolved' the tension between Augustine and Petrarch and allowed cyclical history to flourish once more in humanist early modern Europe 'within' the linear Christian view of history. This coincided with the influence of Niccolò Machiavelli, who was considered taboo but nonetheless was widely read, and who, as we have said already, reasserted Polybius's *Anacyclosis* with renewed vigour and updated historical examples. In France, Claude de Seyssel's *La Grand Monarchie* (1520) also leaned on the Greco-Roman conception of history and reminded his readers that '*all* kingdoms, even the French throne, must one day come to nothing.'[62]

By the time Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was writing in 1625, it had become commonplace to discuss states once more in terms of a life cycle:

> In the youth of a state, arms do flourish; in the middle age of a state, learning; and then both of them together for a time: in the declining age of a state, mechanical arts and merchandise. Teaming hath its infancy, when it is but beginning and almost childish: then its youth when it is luxuriant and juvenile: then its strength of years, when it is solid and reduced; and lastly its old age, when it waxeth dry and exhaust.[63]

However, Bacon, assured of the possibilities of knowledge and science, saw his own time as one of a maturing society that represented a progressive advance on bygone ages: 'We know a great deal more than the ancients did, for we are a great deal older.' We can see in this a proto-progressivism with a belief in the 'unlimited perfectibility of man, at least in the domain of science'.[64] The exhaustion of energy and the final death of civilisation was

too far off in Bacon's own mind to be of concern. We are set for the full progressivism of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment.

However, strangely, once we arrive there, we encounter at least one fundamentally non-progressive view of history articulated by the Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751), a contemporary of both Locke and Newton, in 1740:

> Absolute stability is not to be expected in anything human; for that which exists immutably exists alone necessarily, and this attribute of the Supreme Being, can neither belong to man, nor to the works of man. The best instituted governments, like the best constituted animal bodies, carry in them the seeds of their destruction: and, though they grow and improve for a time, they will soon tend visibly to their dissolution. Every hour they live is an hour the less that they have to live. All that can be done, therefore, to prolong the duration of a good government, is to draw it back, on every favorable occasion, to the first good principles on which it was founded. When these occasions happen often, and are well improved, such governments are prosperous and durable. When they happen seldom, or are ill improved, these political bodies live in pain, or in languor, and die soon.[65]

As should be clear from the invocation of God in the passage, Bolingbroke did not intend this as a secular or crypto-pagan idea, but nevertheless made no attempt to reconcile this with the Christian linear view of history. As Harvey Mansfield notes, 'there is more than a hint of Machiavelli in this',[66] who, as I have noted numerous times, took his cyclical view of history wholesale from Polybius. Bolingbroke was especially influential on the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, and particularly on John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. In a sense, Polybius's *Anacyclosis* is 'baked into' America's founding documents and somewhat explains their preference, like Machiavelli and Cicero before them, for a 'mixed' republic as the ideal form of government. It can also be said, perhaps disconcertingly for modern Americans, but with some justification, that they founded the United States with a view that it was destined one day to fail no matter their original intentions. This is in sharp contrast to the progressive millennialist strain in American thought that resulted in such formulations as 'manifest

destiny' in the nineteenth century, 'the shining city upon a hill' in the twentieth century, and neoconservative Bush doctrine (to spread liberal democracy around the world) of the twenty-first century.

In this brief sketch of Western historiography from the seventh century BC to the eighteenth century, I have identified at least seven distinct patterns which we will be able to spot in, or at least compare to, the thinkers studied in the remainder of this book:

*Cyclical Models*

1. The pattern of rise and fall: this is the general shape of history outlined by both Herodotus and Thucydides that is generically common to practically all the other cyclical models.
2. The degenerative cycle of the four ages: this is the Gold–Silver–Bronze–Iron model of Hesiod, the Zoroastrians, and the Hindu Yuga cycles in which a state of initial perfection degenerates by ages to a final barbarism before the cycle starts again.
3. The *Anacyclosis*: this is the *political* pattern of constitutional cycles outlined by Polybius which follows the sequence monarchy, kingship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and ochlocracy before a period of barbarianism resets the cycle.
4. The providential cycle (judgement–retribution–restoration): this follows the pattern of the Book of Jeremiah and the 'alternative' Christian tradition of the Venerable Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth.
5. The Phoenix cycle (birth–death–rebirth): this is Petrarch's model which posits a Dark Age between two better periods and in which the New Age will look to Antiquity for inspiration.

**Linear Models**

1. The Six Ages of Man: this is Augustine's model that plots human history from the Biblical Genesis to the Apocalypse. The first five ages comprise the events of the Bible, while the expansive sixth age, which

includes the present time, stretches from the first coming of Jesus Christ until the last judgement and gets older and more decayed over time. In this view of history, things will only get worse until the second coming.

2. The progressive vision of history: this is the notion that humans, through reason and knowledge, and their mastery of science and their environment, can harness an unlimited perfectibility—materially, morally, and socially.

As we have seen, these cycles are not mutually exclusive and can be 'nested' in one another. For example, at least theoretically, Petrarch's 'Phoenix cycle' takes place 'within' Augustine's Sixth Age. Likewise, the cycles of the *Anacyclosis* take place 'within' the each of the four ages of the degenerative cycle. Moving forward, it will be useful to earmark this and the preceding page or two, since these older cycles will be referred to fairly frequently in the succeeding chapters.

1 George Harrison, 'All Things Must Pass', *All Things Must Pass* (London: EMI, 1970).

2 Tony Blair, 'Conference Speech 2005', *The Guardian* (27 September 2005): https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/27/labourconference.speeches.

3 Alex Wickham and Rachel Morison, 'UK Braces for Blackouts, Gas Cuts in January Emergency Plan', *Bloomberg* (9 August 2022): https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-09/uk-braces-for-blackouts-gas-cuts-in-january-in-emergency-plan.

4 Andy Bruce and David Millikan, 'UK Inflation Hits 40-year Record, Highest in G7', *Reuters* (22 June 2022): https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/uk-inflation-hits-91-may-2022-06-22/.

5 Graham Hiscott, 'Return to the Dark Ages', *Daily Mirror* (7 October, 2022).

6 Andrew Cavallier, 'Republicans Tear into "Banana Republic" Trump Raid and vow REVENGE in November', *Daily Mail* (9 August 2022): https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11093665.

7 Brooke Masters, 'Blackrock Chief Larry Fink says Ukraine War Marks End of Globalisation', *Financial Times* (24 March 2024): https://www.ft.com/content/0c9e3b72-8d8d-4129-afb5-655571a01025.

8 Zack Budryk, 'Majority in New Poll Worried and Pessimistic About Nation's Future', *The Hill* (19 January 2021): https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/534740-majority-in-new-poll-worried-and-pessimistic-about-nations-future/.

9 Jim Pickard, 'Most Britons Pessimistic About the Future, Survey Finds', *Financial Times* (31 December 2021): https://www.ft.com/content/08d13d12-2a96-4020-88c9-eb5fb666559a.

10 David G. Blanchflower and Alex Bryson, 'The Female Happiness Paradox', DoQSS Working Papers 22-0, *Quantitative Social Science* (April 2022): http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp2202.pdf.

11 Noah Keate, 'Male Suicide Rates at an All-Time High: Why?', *The Boar* (24 September 2020): https://theboar.org/2020/09/male-suicide-rates-at-an-all-time-high-why/.

12 Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), p. 13.

13 Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. 298.

14 Jonathan Benthall, 'Renaissances', *Times Literary Supplement* (14 May 2010), p. 5.

15 Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022).

16 James Burnham, *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom* (London: Putnam, 1943), p. 154.

17 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

18 Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 371–413.

19 Mark Anthony Hermans, *Polybius's Theory of the Anacyclosis of Constitutions* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1991), unpublished thesis, p. 8.

20 See Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, ed. James E.G. Zetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–58; and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (1517; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.2, pp. 10–14.

21 G.W. Trompf, *The Idea of Recurrence in Western Thought: From Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1979), p. 36.

22 Polybius, *The Histories*, pp. 374–378.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 378.

24 Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 96–103.

25 See Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, 'Hesiod and Historiography', *Hermes* 85:3 (November 1953), p. 275.

26 See Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (1934; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995), p. 177.

27 *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), OT, p. 970. All subsequent biblical quotations are to this volume.

28 Hubert Wayne Nelson, *Kykloi: Cyclical Theories in Ancient Greece* (Portland, OR: Portland State University, 1980), unpublished thesis, p. 98.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

30 Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 23.

31 Paul G. Kuntz, 'Linear of Cyclical Order?: Contrasting Confessions of Augstine, Vico and Joyce', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 75:4 (Winter 1992), p. 517.

32 Trompf, *The Idea of Recurrence in Western Thought*, pp. 2, ix.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

34 Paul Archambault, ‘The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World: A Study of Two Traditions’, *Revue d’Etudes Augustiniennes Et Patristiques*, 12:3-4 (1966), p. 201.

35 Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, p. 40.

36 Stow Persons, ‘The Cyclical Theory of History in Eighteenth Century America’, *American Quarterly*, 6.2 (Summer 1954), p. 149.

37 *The Bible*, NT, pp. 316–17.

38 Johann Peter Kirsch, ‘Millennium and Millenarianism’, in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 10 vols. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), vol. 10, pp. 307–309.

39 Persons, ‘The Cyclical Theory of History in Eighteenth Century America’, pp. 148–149.

40 Carl Becker, ‘Review of J.B. Bury, The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth’, *The American Historical Review*, 26:1 (October 1920), p. 77.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78.

42 Zachary A. Strietelmeier, ‘Remembering the Middle Ages’, *Tenor of Our Times*, 2 (Spring 2013), p. 58.

43 Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God Against the Pagan*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22.30, p. 1182.

44 Strietelmeier, ‘Remembering the Middle Ages’, p. 58.

45 Otto of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 AD*, ed. Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 323.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 454.

47 Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 103; Barry Lewis, ‘Religion and the Church in Geoffrey of Monmouth’, in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 418–419.

48 *The Bible*, OT, pp. 828–835; see also John Goldingday, *The Theology of Jeremiah: The Book, The Message, The Man* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy Press, 2021), pp. 103–113.

49 *The Bible*, OT, pp. 849–850, 877.

50 Walter Bruggemann, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 104.

51 Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Prophets* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), p. 64.

52 *The Bible*, OT, p. 891.

53 Bruggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 113.

54 Goldingday, *The Theology of Jeremiah*, pp. 134–139.

55 Barry Lewis, ‘Religion and the Church in Geoffrey of Monmouth’, pp. 421, 418.

56 Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, p. 161.

57 Strietelmeier, ‘Remembering the Middle Ages’, p. 59.

58 Peter Turchin, *War and Peace and War: The Rise and Fall of Empires* (New York and London: Penguin, 2007), p. 91.

59 Shalom Solomon Wald, *Rise and Decline of Civilizations: Lessons for the Jewish People* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), pp. 43–49.

60 Bod, *A New History of the Humanities*, p. 162.

61 Strietelmeier, 'Remembering the Middle Ages', p. 60.

62 Archambault, 'The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World', p. 215.

63 Francis Bacon, 'Of Vicissitude of Things', in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Dennan Heath, 14 vols. (1858; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), *Vol. 6: Literary and Professional Works 1*, pp. 516–517.

64 Archambault, 'The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World', p. 217.

65 Henry St John Bolingbroke, 'The Idea of the Patriot King', in *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke*, 4 vols. (1844; London: Frank Cass and Company, 1967), vol. 2, p. 397.

66 Harvey C. Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (1965; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 77.

# *2: Giambattista Vico*

Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) spent most of his life as a Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Naples where he taught for more than forty years. He led 'an astoundingly uneventful life'.[1] He was sickly, bullied, and given 'the cruel nickname "Mastro Tisicuzzo" ("Master Bag-and-Bones"), an antique slur that captured Vico's gaunt, skin-and-bones appearance'.[2] He aspired to be a Professor of Law but failed to acquire this post in his lifetime. 'His professional advancement was blocked at almost every turn. … all efforts to engage in the transalpine intellectual circles he admired ended in bitter, embarrassing failure. He died at home in poverty and obscurity, a provincial curiosity having left no apparent trace on the European thought of his time.'[3] While he wrote and published copiously on the topics of both jurisprudence and rhetoric, he viewed his *The New Science*, originally published in 1725, as his masterpiece. It failed to make any impact at all on its initial release, as Vico himself recounted: 'In this city I account it [*The New Science*] as fallen on barren ground. I avoid all public places, so as not to meet the persons to whom I have sent it; and if I cannot avoid them, I greet them without stopping; for when I pause they give me not the faintest sign that they have received it, and thus they confirm my belief that it has gone forth into a desert.'[4] Vico reworked and expanded *The New Science* until it reached its final form in 1744, the year of his death. It did not find its audience and Vico was mostly forgotten in the 1800s.

After more than a century of neglect, Vico was 'rediscovered' in the mid-twentieth century by the novelist James Joyce, as well as by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin, and his reputation has been greatly enhanced ever since.[5] He tends to be understood today as the godfather of historicism. For example, Berlin credited Vico with developing 'the whole doctrine of historicism in embryo'.[6] Roger D. Henson called him 'the first *forerunner* to historicism'.[7] Very generally speaking, historicism is the belief that to understand anyone or anything from the past, you must first understand their various social and cultural contexts *in situ*.[8] Vico believed that 'the contents of human consciousness, were not formed by each individual for himself, but

were largely inculcated into him by first, the type of family background he had, then the sort of education … he underwent, then by the social position he held in society.'[9]

In *The New Science*, Vico set himself two tasks: the first is 'to describe an eternal history upon which the histories of all nations run their temporal course in their emergence, progress, maturity, decadence, and end.'[10] 'This "ideal eternal history" is the single, universal pattern which all societies, in their rise and fall, are bound sooner or later to fulfil.'[11] The second is to reject 'rationalist Cartesian claims, on the grounds that rationality is only a partial element of the complexities of the mind'.[12] For Vico, modern rationalist 'philosophy does not render men free; it merely condemns him to social decline.'[13] In contrast, for René Descartes, 'valid knowledge is to be obtained only by the methods of the sciences, which Descartes and his followers contrasted with the unscientific hotchpotch of sense perception, rumour, myth, fable, travellers' tales, romances, poetry and idle speculation that in their view passed for history and worldly wisdom, but did not provide material amenable to scientific, that is, mathematical, treatment. … Vico was not prepared to accept this.'[14] For him, the ancient distinction between philosophy and poetry had been a disaster for humanity, since to deny poetry is to deny all those non-rational sides of life that really matter to most people, and which underpin the social fabric. Thus, he objected to the 'anti-social character' of Enlightenment rationalism.[15] As Berlin put it:

> Vico was a reactionary, a counter-revolutionary figure, opposed to the central stream of the Enlightenment. His hostility to Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and to all attempts to apply the concepts and methods of the natural sciences to what is human in human affairs—which seemed to him tantamount to dehumanising man—anticipated the positions of Hamann and Herder and Burke, and the Romantic movement.[16]

In countering Enlightenment thought in this way, Vico sought to replace 'the conception of man as a self-contained and self-determining being, by that of man as a socially conditioned entity. He believed that 'society, rather than being composed of an aggregate of individual people, really constituted a sort of unity.' In this, 'Vico presented a picture of the relation between the individual and society that was more or less the exact opposite as that presented by the rationalists.'[17] However, he did not do this merely

by reasserting the older values. 'He is unwilling to surrender politics to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Bayle by withdrawing into Catholic otherworldliness.'[18]

> The moderns had, so to speak, let the genie out of the bottle. They first employed a new realism to convince their readers that man is a creature of passion and desire, living in a non-hierarchical world without God; they then taught how to exploit this realism to acquire mastery over nature and politics by means of modern science. … [Vico] knew that the genie could not be put back. … He accepted the stark realism and scientific outlook of his modern adversaries, in the hope that these new methods could be turned against the moderns' own theological and political teachings.[19]

Thus, as much as he asserts the importance of myth and poetry, Vico is at once curiously empirical and even realist in his analysis. Labels such as 'reactionary' and 'counter-Enlightenment' perhaps do not capture the extent to which he is also *post*-rationalist and *post*-Enlightenment—and, dare I say, 'postmodern', centuries before such a label had been dreamed up. 'Vico makes it possible to give a rationalist defense of man's basic irrationality. He gives a non-religious defense of religion. He gives a non-traditional defense of tradition, and an unconventional defense of convention. He's a non-historical defender of historical life, particularity, and identity.'[20]

By 'poetry', Vico means 'the spirit of the memory, the language of the imagination and passions. … His aim is to awaken the need to retrieve human creativity and freedom of imagination as the values in the theory of education (and culture) he articulates.'[21] The two great doors through which to achieve this are the study of language and mythology.[22] Specifically, he focused on the study of origins using the genetic method: 'Vico comprehends all human phenomena in terms of their origins and courses of development.'[23] He had a 'conviction that all knowledge … is rooted in the imagination'.[24] If Hesiod believed that once giants roamed the Earth, or if the audiences of Shakespeare believed in witches, what matters is less whether there *were* giants or witches, as measured by the objective tools of science, but rather how those genuinely-held beliefs affected the social fabric. It will not do for the modern scholar merely to scoff at the childish, silly, or superstitious views of their ancestors, they must be

understood *on their own terms*. One is reminded a little of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's 'thick description', which sought to understand the meaning of certain actions and symbols in a given culture as the people of that culture would understand them. Geertz imagines the anthropologist coming down as an alien, totally ignorant of the ways of humans. Imagine a cheeky schoolboy about to play a prank gives a little wink. For the alien, this is a muscular contraction of the right eyelid. But the task of the anthropologist is to immerse himself in the culture, its customs, beliefs, and habits, long enough to understand that the wink is a culturally encoded *signal* which connotes that a prank is about to be played. [25] This is the basic attitude of Vico to the past: he seeks to avoid anachronism, the importing of the attitudes and judgements of his own time onto the people of bygone eras.

In this way, 'Vico virtually invented a new field of social knowledge, which embraces social anthropology, the comparative and historical studies of philology, linguistics, ethnology, jurisprudence, literature, mythology, in effect the history of civilisation in the broadest sense.'[26] As Berlin explains:

> When Vico speaks of what he calls the 'poetical' cast of mind —the poetical language, poetical law, poetical morals, poetical logic and so on. By 'poetical' he means—what, following, the Germans, we tend to attribute to the people of 'folk'—modes of expression used by the unsophisticated mass of the people in the early years of the human race, not by the children of its old age—self-conscious men of letters, experts or sages.[27]

The spirit of Ancient Greece, for example, cannot be captured by studying the likes of Plato, rather one must turn to poets such as Homer. Although, as Vico himself would note, Plato and Homer belonged to and were emblematic of different ages: Homer came from the Age of Heroes, while Plato came from the Age of Men.

Let us turn, then, to outline Vico's 'ideal eternal history' in full. He derives the basic pattern of three ages—the Age of Gods, the Age of Heroes, and the Age of Men—by retelling his own version of ancient history and by showing how the Romans followed the same basic pattern in their rise and fall as the Greeks who came before them. In arguing that the intellectualism of Socrates and Plato was fatal to Greek civilisation, Vico

anticipates Friedrich Nietzsche, although there is no evidence that Nietzsche had ever read Vico.[28] For Vico civilisation starts when three basic conditions are met: the establishment of a religion, marriage rites, and burial rites. Once these things are in place, they should trigger a new cycle and the first of the three ages will begin in earnest. Vico claims to have inherited the division of the three ages from the Egyptians as outlined by Herodotus.[29] The first men in the Age of Gods are barbarians living a rough existence on the frontiers, 'outside' civilisation and on hostile terrain (e.g. desert, mountains, forests). They are limited in intellect and learning but have immense powers of imagination. For example, when these primitive men experience a storm with lightning and thunder, they feel fear and imagine they have invoked the anger of the Gods. According to Vico, this is The Spark which causes men to develop morality, experience shame in lust, and to establish marriage rites.[30] As the Age of Gods progressed, 'there would be a caste of priests to interpret the commands of the Gods. Kings would try to get divine sanction for their possession of their powers and so on.'[31] The age is marked by a fear of the supernatural.

As society grows and becomes more complex, the needs arise for family alliances and a disciplined military to mitigate against both external attack and internal dissent. And thus emerges the Age of Heroes, which is characterised by its roughness. According to Vico, this is embodied in the time of Homer who is 'incomparable in: his wild and savage comparisons, his crude and atrocious descriptions of battle and death, those sentences of his filled with sublime passions, and in his expression, filled with clarity and brilliance'. 'His heroes always ate roasted meat, the food which is the simplest and plainest of all.'[32] Within the Age of Heroes, maintenance of the social order becomes very important: laws become 'very precise, pedantic and particular and seem to us much more concerned with the details of things than their spirit'.[33] Eventually, however, within the crudeness of the Age of Heroes, there develops the faculty for intellect and reason, which produces the Age of Men. This age is marked by its innovation, material wealth, and increasing sophistication, as well as by its relative gentleness: 'After passing through ages of divine fear and heroic roughness, man becomes soft and sentimental; he develops a "love of ease, tenderness to children, love of women and desire of life"'.[34] I will return to how the Age of Men degenerates into a 'second barbarianism' shortly.

While the three ages represent a development and progression from one to the next, each one containing the residues and memories of the last, they are also, in a sense, hermetically sealed from one another, a little like Michel Foucault's notion of historical 'epistemes'. An episteme is a particular time and place in history with a particular way of seeing the world, and a set of discourses and practices. In a sense, those within an episteme cannot speak to or understand those from another episteme since everything they can see, think, and feel is socially conditioned by the particularities of their own contexts.[35] For Vico, each age had its own entirely self-consistent way of doing things that fed into all aspects of life. I have summarised his basic descriptions of each age in the table below (Figure 2.1).[36]

| | **Age of Gods** | **Age of Heroes** | **Age of Men** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Nature** | Poetic | Heroic | Intelligent |
| **Custom** | Devotion | Wrathful | Dutiful |
| **Law** | Divine | Force | Reason |
| **Governance** | Theocracy | Aristocratic | Popular liberty |
| **Theocracy** | Religious | Military | Speech |
| **Character** | Hieroglyphics | Archetypes | Alphabet |
| **Jurisprudence** | Mystical | Caution | Equality |
| **Authority** | From the Gods | From writing | Trust |
| **Reason** | By God(s) alone | By state | By the people |

| | Age of Gods | Age of Heroes | Age of Men |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Judgement** | By faith | By strength | By evidence |

*Figure 2.1.*

Vico is neither a reactionary who sees his current time, the Age of Men, in entirely negative terms, nor a Romantic who seeks to venerate the past with rose-tinted glasses. He does not shrink from describing the savagery of the Age of Gods or the crude roughness of the Age of Heroes. Neither does he suggest that the civilising aspects of the Age of Men are all bad. In a sense, he lives up to the title of his book by positing the observations of his *New Science* in a relatively objective and 'value-free' way.

Up until this point, one may be forgiven for mistaking Vico for a kind of progressive. Each of his ages is more sophisticated than the last, there seems to be a clear evolution between them, and the people of the Age of Men are smarter, more sophisticated, and ultimately more civilised than their ancestors. This would be the sort of narrative to which a modern rationalist and atheistic progressive such as Steven Pinker would subscribe enthusiastically.[37] So what is the problem? For Vico, it is that the very faculties which afford the civilising elements in the Age of Men contain the seeds of its own destruction leading to 'the worst tyranny of all being anarchy—that is, the unchecked liberty of free peoples'.[38] We might detect in this an echo of Polybius and the role democracy plays in his *Anacyclosis*. 'Vico is a deeply anti-democratic thinker' because his belief that 'Freedom of speech inevitably breeds unrestricted questioning of accepted values, that is, philosophy and criticism, and in the end undermines the accepted structure of society. Individualism grows to excess, dissolves the ties that unite the mass of people.'[39] With the establishment of rule of law based on general principles and the safety and relative luxury this affords, men become arrogant and hubristic and forget the important role played by those things—such as morality and religion and Vico's 'poetic' categories—which got them to this point. As Leon Pompa ably illustrates:

> He would see no reason why he should accept socially approved standards of conduct and morality, or why he should not indulge all his own self-centred vices. So, at the very

> moment when men appeared capable of setting up the perfectly organised society, one based upon reason and not imagination, man's vices would reassert themselves and begin to undermine socially conditioned behaviour. This would reveal itself first of all in demands for increasingly democratic social, economic and political conditions and institutions, and then in a demand for increasingly permissive forms of social behaviour and morality until finally the very notion of morality, of right and wrong, would disappear.[40]

We can readily see this process in our own time as historical moral norms appear to have collapsed after decades in which our academies and public figures have deconstructed traditional morality and religion and have made a mockery of those who attempt to uphold the old values. In fact, at the time of writing, it has moved beyond mockery to outright punishment.

Vico's name for this process in the Age of Men, by which reason comes to undermine the social bonds that hold a civilisation together, is 'The Barbarism of Reflection'. It is worth reading the passage in which he introduces this term in full, as it provides a good flavour of Vico's style when he is animated by what he is writing:

> However, if a people is rotting in a final stage of civil malady and neither assents to a native monarch nor comes to be conquered and preserved from without by a better nation, then providence works against this extreme evil with the following extreme remedy. Given that such a people become accustomed to thinking in a fashion no different from beasts—each thinking of his own particular advantage—and given that such a people in the last stage of refinement or, to put it better, arrogance, is inclined to resent and lash out at whatever trifle happens to displease it, in the fashion of wild beasts, thus, no matter how great the throng or press of their bodies, they live like brutal beasts in an extreme solitude of spirit and will, with not even two of them being able to agree, while each of them pursues his own pleasure and caprice. Through all this, and by stubborn factionalism and hopeless civil wars, they go on to make forests out of their cities and lairs of men out of these forests; in this fashion, over long centuries of barbarism, they come to

> corrode the misbegotten subtleties of malice-filled ingenuity, which by the barbarism of reflection has turned them into wild beasts more brutal than those in the earlier barbarism of the senses. For the latter reveals a noble savagery, against which another can put up a defense, take flight, or be on guard. But the former, with a base savagery surrounded by blandishments and embraces, plots against the lives and the fortunes of those who are one's own confidants and friends.[41]

'Thus, in the age of fully developed reason, when man realises that there are no constraints other than those he may freely choose to impose on himself as a social being, the element of self-interest is too strong to prevent him from abusing this knowledge and leads ultimately to his social destruction.'[42] 'Sooner or later there would be some sort of enormous civil war and all man's social and cultural achievement would be destroyed. Man would be reduced to his initial state of bestiality from which he could only be rescued by a recurrence of the whole historical cycle.'[43] This is the 'Second Barbarianism' which follows the 'Barbarism of Reflection', 'that state of moral corruption into which men fall towards the end of the third age'.[44]

Hence, we have established Vico's cycle in totality:

1. First Barbarianism.
2. The Spark (i.e. of divinity, barbarians experience fear).
3. Establishment of religion, marriage rites, and burial rites.
4. Age of Gods.
5. Age of Heroes.
6. Age of Men.
7. Barbarism of Reflection.
8. Second Barbarianism (cycle restarts).

What we have not yet established, however, is *why* the Barbarism of Reflection should necessarily lead to a breakdown in the social order. Here

Vico has two interrelated assumptions. The first is his 'belief that religion, however primitive and delusive, alone creates and preserves the social bond, alone humanises and disciplines savage men'.[45] The second is his view that human individuals are, in essence, selfish creatures: 'Vico took such a basically pessimistic view of human nature, and of the *primacy* of individual self-interest, that he believed that social progress could only occur under a series of beliefs which would act as a social constraint even upon social activity.' These beliefs should be in something larger than himself 'wholly beyond his control', *even if those beliefs are objectively false*.[46] Without those beliefs, society will experience 'the slow distinction of unreasoned family attachments' and a breakdown in order on the basis that 'if each person his is own master then each person is also his own judge.' This is how, in the current year, adults expect their children to be able to decide their own gender. 'Individual freedom and philosophy are … equally dangerous in Vico's eyes because they imply each other: once freed from ignorance and injustice, man will almost naturally seek to free himself from authority, religion, and tradition—the very foundations of social life.'[47] This is what Thomas Sowell might call 'the tragic vision' of life: a fundamental refusal of the idea that humans are perfectible and that there are hard limits on what is and is not in our capabilities.[48] 'In Vico, … not only is there an upper limit but human reason deteriorates and is eventually replaced by the poetic modes of thought in the return to barbarism with which the "ideal eternal history" ends.'[49]

Some might object to the classification of Vico as a 'Prophet of Doom', since his own work was looking, much like Petrarch's before him, for a civilisational rebirth, a new Renaissance. Where he is genuinely pessimistic, however, is to the prospects of doing this through reform in our own time, the Age of Men—his rebirth necessitates civilisational collapse and a period of barbarianism that, to our modern sensibilities, may appear like a fate worse than death or price not worth paying. Since Vico believed in Providence, he would assert that such a rebirth is a necessary corrective to a social order that has lost its way. He would also suggest that, whether or not we like it, the process is already well underway and the logic of the 'Barbarism of Reflection' is in itself inescapable. There is also a second reason why reform *within* the Age of Men, which is to say the resurrection of religion and a new lease of life in 'poetic' life, is not possible: the people of the Age of Men are simply too intelligent, too sophisticated, and

ultimately too cynical ever genuinely to feel the fear of the Gods or to be open to the supernatural in the way that the first barbarians where at the start of the Age of Gods. This is where it is most relevant to grasp Vico's staunch historicism: society cannot embody the spirit of another Age, even if individuals in that society recognise, as he did, the need to do so. The brilliance of Vico lies in his anticipation of many currents of thought that would follow him, including the Romantics, Friedrich Nietzsche (whose idea that 'God is dead' in many ways fulfils Vico's prophesy), the cultural relativism of Oswald Spengler, and various postmodern critics of the second half of the twentieth century who shared his scepticism about the Enlightenment.

1 Terence Green, 'Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)', *Philosophy Now*, 127 (Aug/Sept 2018): https://philosophynow.org/issues/127/Giambattista_Vico_1668-1744.

2 Donald Phillip Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's 'New Science' and 'Finnegan's Wake'* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 57.

3 Mark Lilla, *G.B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 1.

4 Giambattista Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. H. Fisch and T.G. Bergin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 14.

5 Joseph Mali, *The Legacy of Vico in Modern Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

6 Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 72.

7 Roger D. Henderson, 'Vico's View of History', *Philosophia Reformata*, 49:2 (February 1984), p. 108.

8 I have published extensively on this topic, see Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare and New Historicist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

9 Leon Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change* (1971; London: IFS Publishing, 2019), pp. 12–13.

10 Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, ed. and trans. Jason Taylor and Robert Miner (1744; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 349, p. 119.

11 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, p. 107.

12 Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Introduction', in *ibid*., p. xvii.

13 Lilla, *G.B. Vico*, p. 209.

14 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, p. 36.

15 Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change*, p. 11.

16 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, pp. 116–117.

17 Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change*, pp. 13, 16, 19.

18 Lilla, *G.B. Vico*, p. 82.

19 *Ibid*., pp. 204–205.

20 Greg Johnson, *From Plato to Postmodernism* (San Francisco, CA: Counter-Currents, 2019), p. 69.

21 Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Introduction', p. xxi.

22 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, pp. 85–95.

23 Thora Ilin Bayer and Donald Phillip Verene, 'Introduction: Interpreting the New Science', in *Keys to the New Science*, ed. Thora Ilin Bayer and Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 2.

24 Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Introduction', p. xxiv.

25 For a longer discussion of Geertz see Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 47–55.

26 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, p. 27.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

28 He puts forward a similar argument in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and other Writings*, ed. Raymond Guess and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (1872; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

29 Vico, *The New Science*, 52, p. 49.

30 *Ibid.*, 506, p. 195.

31 Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change*, p. 35.

32 Vico, *The New Science*, 892–896, p. 355, 801, p. 337.

33 Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change*, pp. 35–36.

34 Lilla, *G.B. Vico*, p. 211.

35 See Parvini, *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory*, pp. 78–89.

36 Vico, *The New Science*, 916–974, pp. 365–385.

37 The sort of argument he makes for example in Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking Books, 2011).

38 Vico, *The New Science*, 1102, p. 447.

39 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, pp. 103–104.

40 Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change*, pp. 38–39.

41 Vico, *The New Science*, 1106, p. 447.

42 Leon Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the 'New Science'*, 2nd edn (1975: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 203–204.

43 Pompa, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change*, p. 39.

44 Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the 'New Science'*, p. 201.

45 Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, p. 125.

46 Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the 'New Science'*, p. 203.

47 Lilla, *G.B. Vico*, pp. 210–212.

48 Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, rev. edn. (1987; New York: Basic Books, 2007), p. 162.

49 Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the 'New Science'*, p. 123.

# *3: Thomas Carlyle*

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), the Sage of Chelsea, was born in the village of Ecclefechan in 1795, raised by devout Protestant parents, attended Edinburgh University and lost his Christian faith after reading *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1789) by Edward Gibbon as a teenager.[1] Carlyle once remarked, 'I do not in the least believe that *God* came down upon earth and was a joiner and made chairs and hog-troughs; or came down at any more than He comes down now into the soul of every devout man.'[2] He broke off plans to join the ministry in 1817 and reluctantly became a mathematics teacher for a period.[3] He married Jane Baille Welsh in 1826. The details of their tumultuous forty-year relationship continue to titillate the vapid British media to this day. For example, Frances Wilson writes in *The Spectator*:

> For some, he was the victim of a shrew who mockingly recorded his every gesture; for others she was the victim of a brute who failed to see her brilliance. 'Being married to him', said Jane's friend Anna Jameson —having just braved the consequences of interrupting the sage in one of his monologues —must be 'something next worse to being married to Satan himself'. Samuel Butler refused to take sides. 'It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs Carlyle marry one another,' he quipped, 'and so make only two people miserable and not four.'[4]

They moved from Scotland to 5 Cheyne Road, Chelsea, in London in 1834; one can still visit the house which has been kept as it was. Carlyle would remain there for the rest of his life.

In the intermediary years, Carlyle had immersed himself in contemporary German literature—at that time, the works of Friedrich Schiller, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Jean Paul Friedrich Richter. It was primarily because of his *The Life of Friedrich Schiller* (1825) and his translations of Goethe and other German writers that he secured a regular income from writing articles on literature and history for *Fraser's Magazine*

from 1830 onwards. ‘He was steeped in German thought, and no one was better equipped to act as the interpreter of Germany to England.’[5] Almost all of Carlyle’s output between 1830 and 1841 appeared first in *Fraser’s*; the books were published in serial form and then later released in their own volumes. However, in 1841, the owner of the magazine, James Fraser, who had been a major champion of Carlyle’s, died.[6] Carlyle took on a new publisher, Chapman and Hall, who bought the rights to all his previous works and remained his sole book publisher until his death in 1881, although he continued contributing articles to *Fraser’s*. This was partly because Carlyle wished to deal with as few publishers as possible; he wrote in 1842: ‘I avoid all Booksellers; see them rarely, the blockheads; study never to think of them at all.’[7]

Carlyle was arguably Britain’s pre-eminent man of letters in the nineteenth century—Ralph Waldo Emerson called him ‘the undoubted head of English letters’.[8] ‘A very good argument could be made that Carlyle is *the* central figure in nineteenth-century literature.’[9] He was almost certainly the best connected. He had either correspondence or personal friendships with, among countless others, Goethe, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Stuart Mill, Emerson, Alfred Tennyson, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackery, Elizabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, James McNeill Whistler, Frédéric Chopin, Charles Darwin, Robert Peel, and Louis Napoleon. By the time of his death, in 1881, he had been interviewed by Queen Victoria and refused a knighthood offered by Benjamin Disraeli. His books also sold in large numbers for the period, with each of his major titles selling tens of thousands of copies annually up to 1901.[10] He was widely read and quoted by educated people across Europe and America with particular popularity in Germany.

Carlyle was neither a liberal nor a democrat, but he was also not a ‘small c’ conservative who believed gradual reform was either desirable or possible—in contrast to, for example, Edmund Burke or Russell Kirk. While he was a kind of perennial traditionalist, he was not afraid of drastic change or even revolution if a ruling class had become too corrupt or decadent to serve. If Burke’s chief lesson from the French Revolution was to avoid revolutions at all costs, Carlyle saw change, even violent change, as being sometimes necessary and coming, as in Heraclitus, as an all-consuming and purifying fire. If people feel abandoned or betrayed by their

rulers, then history—which for him had a spiritual dimension—will find a way to cleanse and punish the 'corrupt worn-out Authority'.[11] Social energies will coalesce around a hero, a man of action, one who is resolute, steady, and uncompromising, embodying the 'Everlasting Yea', driven as if by divine providence to restore the moral and political order. 'The History of the world', wrote Carlyle in *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), 'is but the Biography of great men.'[12] For Carlyle, what had gone wrong in England after the Industrial Revolution was not a matter of mere policy, but a deep spiritual malaise in which a morally bankrupt and deadening economic utilitarianism had come to suffocate any sense of the heroic or transcendent. As he put it in 'Sign of the Times' (1829), he lived in 'an Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word'. He yearned for 'the primary unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and *infinite* character'.[13]

Carlyle was a man of many contradictions: profoundly religious yet a kind of atheist ('Calvinism without the theology', as his biographer Anthony Froude famously put it);[14] vehemently opposed to free market economics yet a supporter of the repeal of the Corn Laws; he had a passionate concern for the poor and downtrodden yet resolutely opposed both democracy and the abolition of slavery; at once somehow lofty and prophetic yet stubbornly down-to-earth; he had many socialist admirers including, among others, John Ruskin, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, and yet he was unmistakably a man of the right committed to hierarchy and social order. His novel *Sartor Resartus* (1834) is best described as an 'anti-novel',[15] which is fitting because he hated fiction. Mill described his best-known and best-loved history, *The French Revolution* (1837), as 'not so much a history, as an epic poem'.[16] Or as another commentator put it, it was 'as if he were a witness-survivor of the Apocalypse'.[17] His bombastic style was so idiosyncratic that it was dubbed 'Carlylese' and described memorably by Thackery: 'It is stiff, short, and rugged, it abounds with Germanisms and Latinisms, strange epithets, and choking double words, astonishing to the admirers of simple Addisonian English.'[18] G.B. Tennyson later wrote, 'not until [James] Joyce is there a comparable inventiveness in English prose.'[19] Few writers in history have thundered on the page, all fire and brimstone, quite like Carlyle, and yet he was never straightforwardly didactic: his work is littered with wry allusions, biting

humour, irony, subtle sarcasm, rhetorical invective, and framing devices that today would be called ‘postmodern’.

An excellent introduction to Carlylese would be to read any of the essays in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), a volume in which he deliberately dialled-up his rhetoric to near self-parodic levels. Let us take ‘Model Prisons’, for example, in which Carlyle takes a tour through a new Victorian prison and laments the fact that conditions are much too comfortable and forgiving for the inhabitants inside. This is a London inhabited by ‘Solemn human Shams, Phantasm Captains, and Supreme Quacks that ride preposterously through every thoroughfare … a Universal Sluggard-and-Scoundrel Protection Society’.[20] Inside the prison we meet:

> Miserable distorted blockheads, the generality: ape-faces, imp-faces, angry dog-faces, heavy sullen ox-faces; degraded underfoot creatures, sons of *in*docility, greedy mutinous darkness, and in one word, of STUPIDITY, which is the general mother of such. Stupidity intellectual and stupidity moral …[21]

This searing, incessant, and relentless piling up of images in a great moral tumult echoes the firebrand preacher. He embodied the voice of the Prophet. In many respects, his unheeded warnings have since come to pass to such an undeniable degree that it is as if he is stepping through time to speak directly to us in the twenty-first century. If Carlyle thought things were bad in 1850, imagine what he would make of today.

Carlyle’s reputation, once soaring and eliciting comparison with Shakespeare, has suffered because of the West’s absurd and hysterical reaction to fascism and his perceived influence on it, although, as we shall see, this has somewhat abated in recent years. Carlyle is also one of the few men in history to have influenced both Karl Marx and Adolf Hitler. Friedrich Engels, co-author of *The Communist Manifesto* with Marx, commented while reviewing *Past and Present* in 1844 that ‘Carlyle’s book is ten thousand times more worth translating into German than all the legions of English novels.’[22] Joseph Goebbels reputedly read excerpts of Carlyle’s *Frederick the Great* (1865) to Hitler in his bunker and reported in his diaries that ‘the Führer had tears in his eyes’.[23] The Nazis had also made *On Heroes* compulsory reading on the school curriculum. Because of this, Carlyle fell out of fashion after the Second World War, especially after

J. Salwyn Schapiro, a prominent New York Professor, had labelled him 'The Prophet of Fascism' in 1945.[24] It became commonplace to argue that Carlyle's hero 'is well on the way to become a Hitler or a Stalin'.[25]

While he is not read as widely now as he had been before the war, by the early 1970s, Carlyle had been largely rehabilitated inside the academy: there have been at least four major biographies since 1974, a dozen or so monographs, hundreds of journal articles, and major scholarly editions of his works published by university presses. It is still common to see *Sartor Resartus*, *Past and Present* (1843), *On Heroes*, or shorter works such as *Chartism* (1839), 'Characteristics' (1831), or 'Sign of the Times' as set reading on many Victorian Literature courses, which is perhaps surprising given the abject state of the modern academy and the fact that Carlyle was an avowed and unapologetic racist, but it is also testament to his importance to the social debate of the period. We still feel his influence on that debate now, if indirectly. When many people think of Victorian London, their minds likely imagine a scene from a Charles Dickens novel, but Dickens was profoundly influenced by Carlyle as he wrote to him in a letter in 1863: 'I am always reading you faithfully, and trying to go your way.'[26] The influence is especially marked in Dickens's more pessimistic later work such as *Hard Times* (1854), which was dedicated to Carlyle, and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), which was directly inspired by Carlyle's *French Revolution*.

Carlyle's impact on how we think about the Victorian era is so marked that he coined even the language with which we use to describe it and its legacy. For example, he was the first writer to use the word 'industrialism' in 1829;[27] 'captains of industry' to describe tycoons in 1833;[28] 'the Condition of England Question' to describe the living conditions of the working classes in 1839;[29] 'cash nexus' to refer to the reduction (under capitalism) of all human relationships to monetary exchange in the same year;[30] and 'the dismal science' to refer to economics in 1849.[31]

Carlyle never wrote any systematic treatise of philosophy. His works can be divided into three main categories through which he develops his thought: literary review, history, and social commentary. His early career, encompassing the 1820s, is marked by his interest in German literature and the influence of Schiller and Goethe. This may be called his Romantic period, the culmination of which came in the form of the strange anti-novel *Sartor Resartus* ('The Tailor Re-Tailored'). In it, an English editor struggles

to understand the life and work of a German professor called Diogenes Teufelsdröckh who is a 'philosopher of clothes'. The editor muddles through a fictional manuscript, *Die Kleider*, on the origin and influence of clothes before giving some details of Teufelsdröckh's life and outlining his philosophy. Still a bizarre and beguiling text, *Sartor Resartus* can be read as an attempt to confront an empirically and materially minded British audience with German transcendental idealism. It was the best-selling book during his lifetime and sold over 75,000 copies.

Carlyle became a major literary figure primarily as an historian with the publication of *The French Revolution* in 1837. Charles Dickens would apparently lug around the three volumes with him wherever he went and claimed to have read it 500 times. It remains a blistering account of those terrifying years of French history—almost like a c*inéma verité* documentary. Carlyle drew his material from hundreds of contemporary newspaper articles, pamphlets, gossip sheets, and anecdotes to bring his history to life. He railed against conventionally written history. Where the antiquarian historian aimed to be objective, Carlyle was opinionated; where the antiquarian historian wrote in neat and arid prose, Carlyle sought to set the page alight with all his rhetorical vigour. Although there is no evidence that he ever read Giambattista Vico, it strikes me that he worked in the 'poetic' mode for which Vico had argued in his *New Science*; Carlyle is unique in his capacity to 'blur the generic boundaries between poetry and history'.[32] Even the mundane scholarly work of sharing sources is brought alive by Carlyle; imagine a regular historian setting up a quotation like this: 'I may as well print the little Note, smelted long ago out of huge dross-heaps in Noble's Book.'[33] His second masterpiece of history, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845), starts with an all-out assault on 'Dryasdust', the hated conventional historian: 'Dull Pedantry, conceited idle Dilettantism,—prurient Stupidity in what shape soever,—is darkness and not light! … Given a divine Heroism … they smother it in human Dulness … touch it with the mace of Death.'[34] His basic idea of history as being primarily the deeds of Great Men is outlined in *On Heroes*. It should be noted that the modern liberal order *detests* this idea and seeks to explain away such figures as Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and so on as being mere functions of structure or economic forces. This is not a mere debate over historiography, there is a deep metapolitical dimension to the banishment of the theory of the Great Man from polite

discourse. The *heroic* is a genuinely terrifying idea to the liberal mind which must seek to make everything petty and small. Even today we witness countless liberal publications attempt to account for Vladimir Putin by means of amateur psychologizing. 'He's gone mad!', they shriek, but only because the notion of a Great Man who stands up for his nation is such an anathema to their worldview. They cannot even process the notion, which is why every attempt was made to confine Carlyle to the dustbin of history.

Many readers today, however, will find even greater interest in Carlyle's social and political writings. His social thought starts with 'Sign of the Times' in 1829 and develops through 'Characteristics' (1830), *Chartism* (1840), *Past and Present* (1843), 'The Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question' (1849), *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), and 'Shooting Niagara and After?' (1867). Although it is common to argue that he becomes an 'extremer authoritarian … far more radical and inflammatory' in his later years,[35] the core of his political thinking does not change.[36] His attitude becomes darker and more severe and less hopeful over time, but this is not least in part out of anger and dismay that his audience was 'hearing but not heeding his message'.[37] By the time of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, he despaired: 'Oh I am sick of the stupidity of mankind … I had no idea till late times what a bottomless fund of darkness there is in the human animal.'[38] The basic Carlylean thesis—which was inherited almost wholesale by many later conservatives who stood against capitalism—is that the materialist, utilitarian economism that had come to dominate England sapped all that is vital about life, leading to both human catastrophe and spiritual and moral decline. He viewed *laissez-faire* economics as an abnegation of responsibility: the ship of state must be steered. The gospel of Mammon comes to replace God; the doctrine of 'cash-payment' becomes the 'universal sole nexus of man to man'.[39]

He had a special disdain for utilitarianism and Jeremy Bentham, who he attacks in one of many extraordinary rants in *On Heroes*:

> Mahomet has answer this question, in a way that might put some of us to shame! He does not, like a Bentham, a Paley, take Right and Wrong, and calculate the profit and loss, ultimate pleasure of the one and of the other; and summing all up by addition and subtraction into a net result, ask you, Whether on the whole the Right does not preponderate

> considerably? … Benthamite Utility, virtue by Profit and Loss; reducing this God's-world to a dead brute Steam-engine the infinite celestial Soul of Man to a kind of Hay-balance for weighing hay and thistles on, pleasures and pains on.[40]

Much like Vico, as an antidote to rationalism and utilitarianism, 'Carlyle worked to show the responsibilities inherent in the undeniable interconnection between every person in society to counter the increasing valuation of doing as one likes.'[41] The social bonds and moral unity of the medieval period (he points to the twelfth century in *Past and Present*) was much preferable to the situation after industrialism. One issue with such a soul-sapping social environment is the 'despair of finding any Heroes to govern you'. He saw democracy as an abomination and a symptom of the moral cowardice of the governing class. He had no patience for Parliament whatsoever: 'Dost thou think that Willemus Conquestor would have tolerated ten years' jargon, one hour's jargon, on the propriety of killing Cotton-manufactures by partridge Corn Laws?'[42] In Carlyle, democracy is a demonic, entropic force, as he put it in 'The Present Time' (1850): 'a bottomless volcano, or universal powder-mine of most inflammable mutinous chaotic elements.'[43]

While Carlyle's political and social stances are clear, his views on the shape of history require teasing out. He never outlined them systematically in a dedicated work, and thus they must be drawn from across his corpus. There is something of Petrarch's Phoenix cycle of birth–death–rebirth in Carlyle's conception of history, as well as the providential cycle of judgement–retribution–restoration which must come through the figure of the Great Man of history, or, in other words, a hero. God can be seen to act providentially through the hero: 'The hero is simultaneously transcendental, in that he always embodies the same transcendental authority, and historical, in that the embodiment belongs to a specific time, place, and culture.'[44] When a social order has become too decadent it must be cleansed with fire: the 'necessary destruction of sham belief and government'. 'His conception of change was further influenced by the Saint-Simonians' patterning of human history as an alternation of "organic" periods of faith and "critical" periods of rationalism.'[45] 'Carlyle's vision was that the spiritual nature of the universe is written out in negative or positive fashion in the lives and actions of men of every age. Some ages …

are prosaic. These are ages of doubt and theological controversy. Other ages are poetic, thus ages of the celebration of God.'[46] Carlyle thus appears to have viewed history as a series of oscillations between rationalist and 'poetic' ages following no chronology, but rather a constant back and forth.

Something of this can be seen in *The French Revolution*:

> For him, such events as the Terror in France, the destruction of faith by the *philosophes*, the rise of utilitarianism, puffery, and the cash-nexus are not the end of the world; they merely hasten he destruction of an already-corrupt society and clear the way for a new, better society. … An ideal society would enact religious principles of charity, duty, obedience to just leadership, reverence, and work. But *actual* society passes through cycles much like seasons of the year: autumnal periods when faith fades; wintry, 'decadent ages in which no Idea grows or blossoms', ages when 'Belief and Loyalty have passed away, and only the cant and false echo of them remains.'[47]

Carlyle plainly saw his own time as such a rationalist winter and longed for its total replacement with a 'poetic' social order created by 'a re-born religion', which for him was a kind of 'pantheism' or Absolute, a yearning for the transcendent.[48] Although it is articulated in an altogether different way, we might again see convergence here with Vico, whose critique of rationalism and the Enlightenment shares many points of similarity with Carlyle's critique of utilitarianism. Like Vico, 'Carlyle belongs to what Isaiah Berlin calls the "Counter-Enlightenment".'[49] Both Vico and Carlyle sought an escape from an increasingly rationalist milieu to a 'poetic' one. Where Vico argues that his cycle must play out to completion before any rebirth, Carlyle's vision is perhaps more volatile: 'a series of revolutionary upheavals, figured in the apocalyptic death and rebirth of the phoenix, which freed timeless and universal moral realities for development in new forms.'[50] However, just as Vico argues that his Age of Men is almost hermetically sealed from the possibility of seeing the world as men did in prior ages, as we have seen, Carlyle saw the scope of a genuine hero arising from his own era as remote, if not impossible. If even such a Great Man would arise, he needs to be accepted and followed by ordinary men whose reciprocal loyalty is 'of equal importance'.[51]

Carlyle's vision is such that one is always looking for the next Odinic Great Man who might trigger a new 'poetic' age. His own personal favourites were Oliver Cromwell, Frederick the Great, and the Paraguayan dictator, Dr Francia, because he believed these were possible models for what could take place in Britain. However, he did not solely venerate military or political figures, a category he calls 'kings'. Great Men can also be divinities (Odin), prophets (Mohammed), poets (Dante, Shakespeare), priests (Luther), or men of letters (Johnson, Rousseau, Burns). In Britain, he identified the newly empowered 'captains of industry' to be those best placed to provide heroic leadership. While he mocks industrialists who fail to see anything but quantity in the world, such as 'Bobus Higgins, Sausagemaker on the great scale', he nonetheless sees potential in the closest thing Victorian Britain had to a genuine aristocracy to take the reigns and steer the ship back to an acceptable and poetic social order. Even if these men were still bewitched by the 'Cash-Gospel', they could still show a kind of *noblesse oblige* to the poorest and lead 'industrial Soldiers'. The closest we get to this in his works is the character of Plugson of Undershot in *Past and Present*, who is a cotton manufacturer. He is a man of genuine drive and vitality, 'hard energy' as Carlyle calls it, who can transcend being one of the 'vulgar men' to become a true 'Noble'.[52]

Today we might think of some of our contemporaries putting their political hopes in a man like Elon Musk, currently the richest man in the world. Although as Carlyle himself would be quick to point out, all men have their imperfections, and no hero is perfect. Another of America's richest men, Henry Ford, as one example, was far from a perfect man, but he gave generously, provided wage increases for his workers at times of hardship, built schools and hospitals and established the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, and so on—and may lay some claim to being a Carlylean Great Man.[53] Within his own lifetime, some captains of industry did act with a sense of genuine community spirit; the most famous example is the model village of Bournville, founded by the chocolate maker, John Cadbury, in 1861. But it will take more than a few model villages and hospitals to produce the sort of transformative social change for which Carlyle yearned.

1 Portions of this chapter are based on Neema Parvini, 'Remembering Thomas Carlyle', *Chronicles* (July 2022), pp. 18–21.

2 Quoted in J.P. Vijn, *Carlyle and Jean Paul: Their Spiritual Optics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1982), p. 150.

3 Ian Campbell, 'Thomas Carlyle', in *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, ed. Mark Cumming (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2004), pp. 78–79.

4 Francis Wilson, 'Back with a Vengeance', *The Spectator* (11 March 2017): https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/back-with-a-vengeance.

5 D. Lammond, *Carlyle: Great Lives* (London: Duckworth, 1934), p. 47.

6 Patrick Leary, 'James Fraser', in *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, pp. 171–174.

7 Quoted in Andrew M. Stauffer, 'Chapman and Hall', in *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, p. 88.

8 Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Literary Work of Thomas Carlyle', *Scribner's Monthly*, 22 (1881), p. 91.

9 Michael DiSanto, *Criticism of Thomas Carlyle* (Hereford: The Byrnmill Press, 2006), p. xi.

10 Rodger L. Tarr, *Thomas Carlyle: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), p. 451.

11 Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, 3 vols. (1837; London: The Folio Society, 1989), *Volume 1: The Bastille*, p. 201.

12 Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, ed. Michael K. Goldberg (1841; Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 26.

13 Thomas Carlyle, 'Sign of the Times' (1829), in *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. John M. Ulrich, Lowell T. Frye, Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022), pp. 5, 12.

14 For a book-length study on this theme see A. Abbott Ikeler, *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith: Carlyle's Literary Vision* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1972).

15 Rodger L. Tarr, 'Introduction', in Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1834; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. xxi.

16 John Stuart Mill quoted in *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jules Paul Seigel (1971; New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 52.

17 John D. Rosenberg, 'Introduction', in Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (1837; New York: The Modern Library, 2002), p. xviii.

18 William Makepeace Thackery quoted in *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, p. 69.

19 G.B. Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1965), p. 272.

20 Thomas Carlyle, 'Model Prisons', in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, ed. M.K. Goldberg and J.P. Seigel (1850; Ottawa: Canadian Federation for the Humanities, 1983), pp. 78, 85.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.

22 Fredrich Engels, 'The Condition of England: *Past and Present* by Thomas Carlyle, London, 1843' (1844) in *Marx and Engels: Collected Works*, 30 vols. (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2010), vol. 3, p. 467.

23 Quoted in Ian Brockie, 'Adolf Hitler', in *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, p. 223.

24 J. Salwyn Schapiro, 'Thomas Carlyle, Prophet of Fascism', *The Journal of Modern History*, 7.2 (June 1945), pp. 97–115.

25 Herbert Grierson, 'The Hero and the Führer' (1940), in *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*, ed. D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 107. [103–107.]

26 Quoted in Michael Goldberg, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 2.

27 Oliver Bennett, *Cultural Pessimism: Narratives of Decline in the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p. 7.

28 Thomas Carlyle, 'Count Cagliostoro' (1833), in *Historical Essays*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 42.

29 Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism', in *Essays on Politics and Society*, p. 63.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

31 Thomas Carlyle, 'The Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 431.

32 Rosemary Jann, 'History', in *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, p. 220.

33 Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H.D. Traill, 30 vols. (1897; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), *Volume 6: Oliver Cromwell Letters and Speeches I*, p. 20.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 6.

35 David J. DeLaura, 'Carlyle and Arnold: The Religious Issue', in *Carlyle Past and Present: A Collection of New Essays*, ed. K.J. Fielding and Roger L. Tarr (London: Vision, 1976), p. 129.

36 Some critics disagree and spot a 'conservative turn' from *Past and Present* onwards, for example, Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 148. My view is that this comes from a misguided and motivated attempt to claim Carlyle for the left. There is no genuine 'break' in his thought.

37 DiSanto, *Criticism of Thomas Carlyle*, p. xiv.

38 Quoted in John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 155.

39 Carlyle, 'Chartism', p. 97.

40 Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, p. 65.

41 DiSanto, *Criticism of Thomas Carlyle*, p. xvi.

42 Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (1843; Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 213, 212.

43 Carlyle, 'The Present Time' (1850), in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 11.

44 Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991), p. 98.

45 Jann, 'History', p. 219.

46 Walter Waring, *Thomas Carlyle* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 66.

47 Brian Cowlishaw, ‘Phoenix’, in *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia*, p. 375.

48 F.A. Lea, *Carlyle: Prophet of To-Day* (1943; London: Routledge, 2017), p. 172.

49 Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, p. 33.

50 Jann, ‘History’, p. 219.

51 B.H. Lehman, *Carlyle’s Theory of the Hero: Its Sources, Development, History, and Influence on Carlyle’s Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928), p. 41.

52 Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 33, 194, 206.

53 See Steven Watts, *The People’s Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

# *4: Arthur de Gobineau*

Few thinkers in history have been as misunderstood as Count Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), even by his friends such as the German composer Richard Wagner. Gobineau is known as the 'steampunk father of racism', and to have inspired the racial theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain and, later, Adolf Hitler, but as we shall see this was a misappropriation. Far from calling for a racial regeneration and the dominance of a master race, Gobineau was, in fact, a true Prophet of Doom, whose view is marked by an extreme pessimism: it is already too late for human civilisation. It is worth keeping in mind at the outset that, for Gobineau, 'Centuries have passed since the end of the last of the pure Aryans. … There will never be any more Aryans. The future contains only deeper and deeper depths of human degradation.'[1] 'Gobineau at the end of his books states that the history of the world most likely will carry, by its present road, toward that "supreme unity" which he had moreover already declared to be nothing more than the truth of raceless crossbreeds.'[2] It should be obvious how this cannot translate into Nazism or any sort of ethno-nationalist platform: 'Gobineau had no intention of pointing out the path of national or racial regeneration, because he believed this impossible.'[3] As we shall see, his racial theories are also not, strictly speaking, rooted in biology, but rather in a kind of animating spirit. Gobineau was more a kind of 'race mystic' than a prototype for Social Darwinism, 'his view of the future of Europe was necessarily hopeless.'[4]

'He was born into an impecunious family of the proudest aristocratic traditions, at a time when the aristocracy of his country had lost all its privileges and was obliged to compete on equal terms with the bourgeoisie.'[5] Naturally, Gobineau was an ultra-royalist and legitimist who opposed the outcome of the French Revolution in its totality, although his racial theory can be read as an attempt 'to explain the irredeemable degeneracy of the French nobility'.[6] However, in life, he made peace with the fact that the *Ancient Regime* would not be returning and carved out a moderately successful career in the French civil service and as a diplomat. He would be posted to Tehran, Iran, where he became obsessed with

Persian civilisation and culture, penning several studies on this topic; he hero-worshipped Cyrus the Great as the greatest man in history.[7] The course of his career saw him befriend Alexis de Tocqueville, who greatly aided his career as a writer. He was more popular in Germany than in France, and late in life became part of Richard Wagner's inner circle of friends. He completed the four-volume *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*Essay on the Inequality of Races*, hereafter the *Essai*) while he was still relatively young, in 1855. He also wrote novels and short stories, which are still read and studied critically today, despite his reputation as a racist. However, the *Essai* was the centrepiece of his thought and entire worldview. Only the first volume was translated into English in 1915;[8] where necessary I will use available translations from the secondary literature when referring to volumes 2–4.

Before continuing, two aspects of Gobineau's thought are vital to understand. First is that the *Essai* was part of an overall project to oppose the forces of the Enlightenment, particularly democracy and rationalism. This he had in common with Giambattista Vico and Thomas Carlyle as well as the German Romantics; he is frequently cited as a seminal influence for Friedrich Nietzsche. 'Gobineau's debt to European "Counter-Enlightenment" figures such as Hamann, Herder and Jacobi in Germany, Vico in Italy, and also to such French Romantic thinkers as Ballanche, Michelet, J. de Maistre, Saint-Simon, Fourier and others' is clear. 'What Gobineau has always fought in its various manifestations, whether racial, social or political, boils down essentially to the concept of agglutination—or "homogeniferation"', we might simply say 'homogenisation'.[9] The bourgeoisie wants to turn life into 'a milieu as uniform as possible … Civil servants of all ranks and species … swarm and go on multiplying ad infinitum'.[10] Gobineau saw himself as defending the diversity of life from such homogenisation. 'Gobineau was an aristocrat who all his life fought the democratic levelling-trend. Pessimistic and little inclined to believe in Progress he reacted against eighteenth-century rationalism and its abstract notion of man.' 'The thesis of the *Essai* was in contradiction to the spirit of the times, was in fact the very antithesis of the opinions current at that epoch, particularly in France', 'which made a religion of democracy'.[11] Gobineau had a total 'resistance to abstraction, generalization and universalism'.[12] The thrust of his work was perhaps put best by Julius Evola:

> Racism in Gobineau appears essentially as the manifestation of an aristocratic instinct, as an aristocratic reaction against times of democracy, of egalitarianism, of the ascent of the masses. Against the democratic myth of the sovereign people, Gobineau affirms the myth of the dominating noble race. Against the democratico-Jacobin principle of equality, he affirms the principle of human difference. Against the Enlightenment cult of reason, he affirms the superiority of gifts that are not learned and that have a root in the blood, in the race.[13]

I believe this is the correct context in which Gobineau should be primarily understood: as a Counter-Enlightenment figure, against the spirit of his age, as opposed to a pseudo-scientific racist. As we shall see, he was closer to someone like Vico than to either Chamberlain or Hitler.

The second important aspect of Gobineau's work to understand at the outset is that when he uses the extremely broad racial categories of 'white', 'black', and 'yellow', which I will introduce shortly, they do not correspond to our classifications today, which are even cruder ('white' and 'non-white'). For Gobineau, the category of 'white' includes people who might be classed as non-white today, including, depending on who you ask, Arabs, Iranians, Jews, certain Indians, and—perhaps more bafflingly—the Chinese. The category of 'yellow' includes Finns, Slavs, and North Indians. 'Black' refers to what we would call today 'black', although, as we shall see, his application of this term *in situ* comes to refer to a wide range of people who we would today recognise as being 'white'. It is worth keeping this in mind throughout because many of Gobineau's statements can be alarming to modern sensibilities. As I will show, the extent to which these categories are strictly biological is doubtful because they seem to refer to three kinds of human spirit. Rather than 'white', we might say 'chivalric', rather than 'black' we might say 'primal', and rather than 'yellow' we might say 'practical'. In fact, such is the cognitive dissonance caused by racial categories in the present day, for the sake of clarity I will substitute these terms in the ensuing discussion. It is clear that they are not scientific categories but rather 'poetic' ones. The *Essai* is properly understood as 'a grand romantic poem'.[14] This is not to 'sanitise' Gobineau, but rather because I believe the discussion will be a lot less confusing if we use my

terms rather than the three colours. It is to render Gobineau readable to modern eyes, in the truest sense in which he was writing.

Let me now outline his basic theory before explaining how it has been misconstrued. Gobineau's *Essai* seeks to explain the phenomenon of civilisational decline. He argues that 'the racial question over-shadows all the other problems of history.'[15] Then one-by-one dismisses all the other causal factors that are typically cited, including those ostensibly identified by thinkers such as Vico or Carlyle, such as government, morality, and religion. He regards 'the ethnic factor as the sole *vera causa* in history' and he strongly makes 'the contention that stock is more decisive than environment'.[16] 'Neither speech nor art, morals nor religion, climate nor economic condition can affect, except superficially, the destiny of peoples.'[17] The general argument is ably summarised below:

- The mortal state of civilisations and of societies results from a general and common cause.
- Neither fanaticism, luxury, immorality, nor irreligion necessarily hasten the downfall of society.
- Differences of climate, surroundings, and temporal circumstances are powerless to change or bridle the genius of a race.
- The relative merits of governments have no influence on the longevity of peoples.
- Race inequality is not the result of institutions.
- Ethnical differences are permanent.
- Christianity neither creates nor transforms the civilising aptitudes of peoples.[18]

We will get into the particulars of his argument in a moment, but it should be noted that in arguing *against* government, morality, and religion as decisive factors in civilisational decline, Gobineau is strikingly original.

Gobineau places his three broad races—chivalric, primal, and practical—into a hierarchy: chivalric at the top, primal at the bottom, practical in the middle. Each race has fixed and immutable characteristics. He declares that only the chivalric are capable of developing civilisation.

> Deriving the [primal] races, which were lowest in his scale of excellence, from Africa, the [practical] from America, and the white from the Hindu Kush mountains of the western Himalayan plateau, he declared that their inequalities were inherent, were independent of habitat and social institution, and expressed themselves in different levels of cultural achievement. … For him the [chivalric] excelled physically, mentally, and morally. As to the social institutions, he found that the [primal races] prefer an anarchistic individualism which finds its inevitable counterpoise in despotism; the [practical races] prefer democracy of a humanitarian and communistic sort; but the [chivalric races], gifted with a special political genius, prefer liberalism, feudalism, parliamentarism, and benevolent imperialism.[19]

In this schema, the primal races are 'dominated by animal passion and equipped with limited intellectual and moral capacities'. The practical races are 'devoted to the achievement of material satisfaction, but otherwise typified by apathetic acceptance of mediocrity in all things'. While the chivalric are marked out and 'sustained' by 'their love of freedom, order, and honour'.[20] The pure chivalric man, for Gobineau, embodies 'Chivalry, honor, and an aristocratic ideal of freedom as exemplified in ancient Teutonic tribal organization'.[21] In other words, 'the [primal] is dominated by mere brute energy, and the [practical] man by a mere sense of the practical, the [chivalric] represents the *juste milieu*.'[22]

There are some odd aspects to this theory that are very seldom grasped. While the chivalric man is a conqueror, a high warrior caste, with a will towards expansion and the establishment of law and order based on 'honour', this is *insufficient* to create what we call 'civilisation'. For example, the primal man, though brutish, is also infused with an artistic energy. It appears Gobineau believed that chivalric man would produce no art without incorporating the primal man into his milieu: 'He also attributed *all* artistic capacities, wherever found, to an original source in the [primal] races. Thus, the extraordinary artistic achievement of classical Greece was due to its possession of the very best proportion of [primal] race infusion.'[23] Likewise, it appears that without the practical man, and their mundane materialism, trade is simply not possible. They require the

chivalric man for sensible government otherwise society will see 'the total subordination of the individual to the State, which is the [practical] man's ideal'.[24] Similarly, the primal races require the chivalric races for government lest they lapse into a crude despotism which will arise naturally to contain their animal passions. Thus, the three races are pushed inevitably together, not only by chivalric expansion but also due to the need for primal energy and the practical man's sense of utility. The result is miscegenation, which contains within it the seed for civilisational destruction, for once the chivalric strain is entirely gone, humans will lapse into despotism or totalitarianism of one kind or another, and the force that maintains the social fabric will be gone forever. 'The tragic element in Gobineau's drama was that civilization arose only by mixture between [chivalric] stock and some modicum of alien blood. Thus miscegenation is not only a stimulant towards achievement but also an agent of eventual decay.'[25] 'He contended that a continued crossing of races resulted in universal mongrelization with the result that all capacities for superior achievement were bred out of the stock.'[26]

Gobineau, in fact, believed that this mongrelisation had already long ago taken place in Europe. The South of Europe and the Mediterranean he saw chiefly as a mix of the chivalric and primal races, whereas in the North he argued that the vast bulk of Europe before chivalric conquest was made up of the practical races, and the people who we see in Scandinavia, France, Germany, and Britain are a mix of chivalric and practical. But in both cases, as in the Middle East and India—which had already long ago 'degenerated'—there were few if any 'pure' chivalric men left. Those people who carried the strongest traces of the chivalric race represented the ruling class in most nations. Thus, in Gobineau's estimation, the bourgeois revolt against the aristocracy in France was, in fact, an ethnic revolt of practical men against chivalric men—although the chivalric spirit had badly degenerated in the latter due to centuries of miscegenation. All ruling classes for Gobineau are, in fact, ethnic castes like the Brahmin in India. This is perhaps easiest to see in the history of Britain from the time of William the Conqueror because the ruling class identifiably consisted of Normans, not Celts, and spoke a different language.

If it is not clear by now, Gobineau's racial categories read a lot more like a set of *general behavioural tendencies* than anything we would have associated with race before embarking on this chapter. He was 'never

concerned with skull measurements or facial angles' and I would like to posit that his analysis is 'poetic' rather than scientific, much in the manner of Vico's *New Science*. He 'drew on anthropology, linguistics, and history in order to construct a fully furnished intellectual edifice'.[27] 'Far from being the serious anthropological study which it purports to be', the *Essai* 'is an imaginative reconstruction of all history'.[28] In 1914, Gerald M. Spring had argued strenuously that the *Essai* should not be mistaken for science because Gobineau was a 'mystic' with a 'poetic temperament' who staunchly opposed 'a materialistic school of optimistic historians'. Rather it should be read as an 'epic poem' or as a 'prose-poem'.[29] The best and most convincing argument made along these lines has been by John Nale, who shows comprehensively that when Gobineau talks about 'blood', he is speaking metaphorically using the organic body of society rather than individual human beings. It is worth quoting Nale at some length:

> The notion of racial blood in Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* is not deployed in a strictly physiological manner. Gobineau refers to blood in a number of passages designating a spiritual and historical substance accounting for the unity of a people. This use of the term cannot be discredited by a chemical or genetic analysis of the material blood because Gobineau is not engaged in a classification of physical body types but rather a historical explanation of civilizations' progress and degeneration. The blood refers to more than a mere biological trait. And the term is deployed in an attempt to comprehend one's physical, psychical, social, political, and, above all, historical ways of being. … Gobineau understands 'blood' to be the common bond that unifies a civilization, a substance that is best studied historically and discursively rather than biologically. In this context, blood refers to the common values, spirit, and history Gobineau feels are essential to any civilization. … in Gobineau's work the blood is definitively not an inanimate liquid but rather signifies the basic values, common discourse, and spirit of a civilization. … [His] invocation of blood concerns the social body, conceived on the model of an organism, referring not to a material substance but rather to the social organism's collective psyche. … The blood is in this important way always more than blood.

> It is not merely a physical substance in the veins but also as the values distinct to a people. This blood, so long as it is pure, is manifested in the social bond or spirit of the people.[30]

Once understood correctly in this way, as a kind of necessary animating spirit or energy, Gobineau's chivalric race more closely resembles Vico's model of the Three Ages. Now in the Age of Men, the chivalric spirit has all but completely dissipated. Gobineau himself puts it *explicitly* in these terms without referencing Vico:

> The [chivalric] race, considered abstractly, has now disappeared from the face of the earth. After having passed the age of the gods, where it was absolutely pure; the age of heroes, where the mixtures were of moderate effect and number; the age of nobility, where its capacities, still great, were no longer renewed by dried up sources, the [chivalric] race moved toward the definitive confusion of all its principles, as a result of its heterogeneous marriages. Consequently, the [chivalric] race is now only represented by hybrids.[31]

The fate of Europe, then, as it becomes ever more bureaucratic, bourgeois, and centralized is the predominance of the practical man over the chivalric man. When understood in *this* way, Gobineau's racial theory starts to bear striking similarities not only with Vico's 'Barbarism of Reflection', but also with Carlyle's ballasts against the materialism and utilitarianism of Victorian Britain.

Before leaving Gobineau, I would like to dwell a little on one of the most interesting aspects of his analysis: that religion is not a factor in the fate of civilisations. Despite being an avowed Roman Catholic, he was arguably 'anti-Christian in spirit'.[32] He maintained that the adoption of Christianity would not change the outcome of a civilisation one way or the other. The following key passage, which I must repeat in full, demonstrates the full force of Gobineau's argument:

> Christians are found in all latitudes and all climates. Statistics, inaccurate perhaps, but still approximately true, show us a vast number of them, Mongols wandering in the plains of Upper Asia, savages hunting on the tableland of the Cordilleras,

Eskimos fishing in the ice of the Arctic circle, even Chinese and Japanese dying under the scourge of the persecutor. The least observation will show this, and will also prevent us from falling into the very common error of confusing the universal power of recognizing the truths of Christianity and following its precepts, with the very different faculty that leads one human race, and not another, to understand the earthly conditions of social improvement, and to be able to pass from one rung of the ladder to another, so as to reach finally the state which we call civilization. The rungs of this ladder are the measure of the inequality of human races. … [Christianity] leaves all men as it finds them—the Chinese in his robes, the Eskimo in his furs, the first eating rice, and the second eating whale-blubber. It does not require them to change their way of life. If their state can be improved as a direct consequence of their conversion, then Christianity will certainly do its best to bring such an improvement about; but it will not try to alter a single custom, and certainly will not force any advance from one civilization to another, for it has not yet adopted one itself. It uses all civilizations and is above all. There are proofs in abundance, and I will speak of them in a moment; but I must first make the confession that I have never understood the ultra-modern doctrine which identifies the law of Christ and the interests of this world in such a way that it creates from their union a fictitious social order which it calls 'Christian civilization.' … Of what importance is the shape of a Christian's house, the cut and material of his clothes, his system of government, the measure of tyranny or liberty of his public institutions? He may be a fisherman, a hunter, a ploughman, a sailor, a soldier—whatever you like. In all these different employments is there anything to prevent a man—to whatever nation he belong, English, Turkish, Siberian, American, Hottentot—from receiving the light of the Christian faith? Absolutely nothing; and when this result is attained, the rest counts for very little. The savage Galla can remain a Galla, and yet become as staunch a believer, as pure a 'vessel of election,' as the holiest prelate in Europe. … During the

> eighteen centuries that the Church has existed, it has converted many nations. In all these it has allowed the political conditions to reign unchecked, just as it found them at first. It began by protesting to the world of antiquity that it did not wish to alter in the slightest degree the outward forms of society. It has been even reproached, on occasion, with an excess of tolerance in this respect; compare, for example, the attitude of the Jesuits towards the Chinese ceremonies. We do not, however, find that Christianity has ever given the world a unique type of civilization to which all believers had to belong. The Church adapts itself to everything, even to the mud-hut; and wherever there is a savage too stupid even to understand the use of shelter, you are sure to find a devoted missionary sitting beside him on the hard rock, and thinking of nothing but how to impress his soul with the ideas essential to salvation. Christianity is thus not a civilizing power in the ordinary sense of the word; it can be embraced by the most different races without stunting their growth, or making demands on them that they cannot fulfil. … Most of the tribes of South America were received centuries ago into the bosom of the Church; but they have always remained savages, with no understanding of the European civilization unfolding itself before their eyes. I am not surprised that the Cherokees of North America have been largely converted by Methodist missionaries; but it would greatly astonish me if this tribe, while it remained pure in blood, ever managed to form one of the States of the American Union.[33]

It strikes me that the difference between a church in an English village and a church in, say, Haiti or the Congo suffices to demonstrate Gobineau's point. Unlike many of Gobineau's wilder claims, this one has some basis in historical fact. That the people change the religion and not vice versa is borne out by history both before his time and since. There is strong evidence that the German barbarian tribes, for example, 'Germanised' Christianity into a chivalric and feudal shape rather than having their own essential forms 'Christianised'.[34] Christianity adapted to operate under a warrior caste and ceased to be martial practically the second it was allowed

to. The famous phrase from the Bible is ‘Render unto Caesar’: thus, when in Rome, the Christians lived as Romans—in fact, that phrase ‘when in Rome’ was Christian in origin: St Ambrose’s advice to St Augustine. When Caesar became a German warlord, Christians became warlike and somehow found justifications for murderous conquest; when Caesar became a conniving merchant, Christians found arguments to justify commerce; and when Caesar became an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer, the church dutifully flew the rainbow flag. As Gobineau argues, this adaptability is Christianity’s ‘greatest innovation’. But what survives the process is Christianity itself while civilisations can come and go like so many seasons. Christianity ‘does not belong exclusively to any civilization. It did not come to bless any one form of earthly existence; it rejects none, and would purify all’.[35]

I should note, however, that despite appearances, these claims from Gobineau do not actually contradict either Vico or Carlyle. For both Vico and Carlyle, the ‘religion’ they talk about is a genuine sense of the transcendent or Absolute—not any *particular organised religion*. In other words, the existence of the established Church in Vico’s own time or in Carlyle’s Victorian Britain did absolutely nothing to mediate their wider claims about the decline of the ‘poetic’. They are not talking about statistics of church attendance, or how many people in the mass call themselves ‘Christian’, they are talking about a deeply felt spirit. For Vico, this was impossible in the Age of Men, just as it was impossible in Gobineau for primal or practical men to embody the chivalric spirit. In this crucial respect, Vico and Gobineau share an anti-universalist cultural relativism. Just as Vico’s Ages are hermetically sealed, so too are Gobineau’s races. Time and again he asserts that ‘civilization is incommunicable’.[36] Whatever Gobineau’s other faults, I believe that there is still utility in this idea. For Gobineau, centuries of miscegenation eventually cause the chivalric spirit to die out. ‘Gobineau paints a vista of exhaustion and disorder—a scene of racial entropy.’[37] While Gobineau’s work is not at all scientific, I believe he captures at a mythic or ‘poetic’ level an aspect of life that some commentators can instinctually recognise today. For example, when Douglas Murray writes in *The Strange Death of Europe* of ‘Europe-fatigue’, an ‘existential tiredness’, and ‘burnout’, he is registering what Gobineau would recognise as the total dissipation of chivalric energy—the will is no longer there. Or when Murray says that Pakistanis living in

Britain do not ‘become as British as anybody else’, but rather turn their areas into miniature versions of Pakistan,[38] he is rearticulating Gobineau’s insight that ‘civilization is incommunicable’—which is to say that the culture comes from the people, and it cannot be otherwise. Recently, the British government released data from the 2021 Census which revealed that the foreign-born population of Britain now stands at 16.6%, representing a 33% increase on the number in 2010;[39] of course, this does not account for second-generation immigrants. The British government has decided *not* to share ethnic or racial data at this time. Gobineau believed hope for Europe was lost even in 1855.

1 Paul A. Fortier, ‘Gobineau and German Racism’, *Comparative Literature*, 19: 4 (Autumn 1967), p. 349.

2 Julius Evola, *The Myth of the Blood: The Genesis of Racialism*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (1937; London: Arktos, 2018), p. 28.

3 Fortier, ‘Gobineau and German Racism’, p. 348.

4 J.M. Hone, ‘The Philosophy of Imperialism’, in E. Seillere, *The German Doctrine of Conquest: A French View* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1914), pp. 23, 34.

5 Gerald M. Spring, *The Vitalism of Count de Gobineau* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1932), p. 23.

6 Steven Kale, ‘Gobineau, Racism, and Legitimism: A Royalist Heretic in Nineteenth-Century France’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 7:1 (April 2010), p. 35.

7 Michael D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services, 1970), p. 187.

8 Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (1855; London: William Heinnemann, 1915).

9 Annette J. Smith, ‘Of Termites and Men or the Politics of Gobineau’, *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, 4:1 (January 1981), pp. 81, 77.

10 Arthur de Gobineau, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 78.

11 Spring, *The Vitalism of Count de Gobineau*, pp. 1, 26, 24.

12 Smith, ‘Of Termites and Men or the Politics of Gobineau’, p. 73.

13 Evola, *The Myth of the Blood*, p. 29.

14 Jean Gaulimer quoted in Alain de Benoist, *The View from the Right*, trans. Roger Adwan (London: Arktos, 2018), vol. 2, p. 107.

15 Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. xiv.

16 A.J.R., ‘Review of Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*’, *An Irish Quarterly Review*, 5:18 (June 1916), p. 311.

17 H.J.W. Hetherington, ‘Review of Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 26:4 (1916), p. 558.

18 Hone, ‘The Philosophy of Imperialism’, p. 32.

19 Frank H. Hankins, ‘Race as a Factor in Political Theory’, in *A History of Political Theory: Recent Times*, ed. Charles Edward Merriam and Harry Elmer Barnes (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 513.

20 Michael Biddiss, ‘The Neglected (V): Gobineau and the Illusions of Progress’, *Government and Opposition*, 19:3 (Summer 1984), p. 353

21 George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (1978; Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), p. 49.

22 Hone, ‘The Philosophy of Imperialism’, p. 35.

23 Hankins, ‘Race as a Factor in Political Theory’, p. 514, emphasis mine.

24 Hone, ‘The Philosophy of Imperialism’, pp. 36–37.

25 Biddiss, ‘The Neglected (V): Gobineau and the Illusions of Progress’, p. 353.

26 Hankins, ‘Race as a Factor in Political Theory’, p. 514.

27 Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, pp. 49–50.

28 Fortier, ‘Gobineau and German Racism’, p. 342.

29 Spring, *The Vitalism of Count de Gobineau*, pp. 86–92.

30 John Nale, ‘Arthur de Gobineau on Blood and Race’, *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 2:1 (2014), pp. 109–119.

31 Gobineau in the *Essai*, quoted in *ibid*., p. 114.

32 Spring, *The Vitalism of Count de Gobineau*, p. 22.

33 Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, pp. 64–69.

34 See Carl Stephenson, *Medieval Feudalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943); James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

35 Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, pp. 66–67.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

37 Biddiss, ‘The Neglected (V): Gobineau and the Illusions of Progress’, p. 354.

38 Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 210, 112.

39 Carmen Aguilar García, Michael Goodier and Pamela Duncan, ‘One in Six People Living in England and Wales Born Outside UK, Census Reveals’, *The Guardian* (2 November 2022): https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/02/one-in-six-people-living-england-wales-were-born-different-country-census-reveals.

# *5: Brooks Adams*

Brooks Adams (1848–1927) is one of the great forgotten men of American intellectual history, which is perhaps due in part to his erratic personality and in part because of the gloominess of his conclusions. He was described as 'eccentric and arrogant' with a 'gruff manner' and a 'penchant for saying shocking things at dinner parties': 'a chronically dissatisfied man, conducting a one-man mutiny against the world as he found it.'[1] He was 'widely read and discussed by the literati in the years that followed, then unjustly forgotten'.[2] 'Brooks Adams generally appears in the history of American thought as Henry Adams's cranky younger brother', an eccentric misanthrope who reputedly began each day 'by singing a song of his own invention, which consisted entirely of three repeated words: "God damn it! God damn it! God damn it!"'.[3] His family dated back to Henry Adams who arrived in Boston in 1636; his great-grandfather was the second President of the USA, John Adams; his grandfather, the sixth President, John Quincy Adams; and his father, Charles Francis Adams, a notable congressman and diplomat. As the youngest of four brothers, who were each notable in their own way, as a writer, Brooks was somewhat overshadowed by Henry Adams, ten years his senior. He reputedly had 'the most erratic mind of the family'.[4] 'Throughout most of his life, Adams seemed to alternate in manic depressive fashion between hope and despair, even managing to combine them simultaneously.'[5] Because of this he was 'sometimes dismissed as a problem in pathology',[6] and 'scorned as the last and least worthy of the captious Adams tribe'.[7] His older brother Charles Francis Adams once quipped that he was 'a compound of incompetence, egoism, pessimism, and self-appreciation!—Always certain and always wrong! Poor Brooks.'[8] On the other hand, when his work is read today over one hundred and twenty years on, his prophecies are starting to look a lot more plausible. During his own life, Adams was not ignored, as Giambattista Vico was, and he exerted some influence over Theodore Roosevelt and therefore had a direct hand in the direction of US policy.

Much like Thomas Carlyle, 'Many contradictory labels have been applied to Brooks Adams: rebel with a "passion for social justice," absolute

authoritarian, “pseudo-progressive,” “constructive conservative,” “prophet and reformer,” “strategist of Realpolitik,” “Jeffersonian Jacksonian Bryanian Democrat,” “neo-Hamiltonian,” aristocrat, early Left-wing New Dealer, proto-Fascist.’ ‘The confusion has stemmed from trying to classify Adams’s social thought in the old liberal-conservative categories and fix it on the Right–Left spectrum.’[9] I can find no evidence that he read Vico or Arthur de Gobineau, but his *magnum opus*, *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895) (hereafter the *Law*) is strongly reminiscent of both. There is also a striking resemblance, in parts, to the thought of Carlyle, although, again, there is no direct citation of Carlyle in Adams, and his brother, Henry, is known to have had ‘little patience’ for the Great Man theory.[10] It appears largely self-generated through the autodidactic study of history, although his brother, Henry, was in constant correspondence and heavily annotated the manuscript. Perhaps because of Henry’s superior literary reputation, his seniority in age—ten years Brooks’s elder—and the fact that Brooks respected him greatly, it is sometimes thought that Brooks derived the theory largely from Henry, but most scholars now agree that the direction of influence was the other way around. Those who knew them both reported that ‘Henry sincerely admired his brother’s intellect; he quoted him the way Saint Augustine quoted Aristotle, only more frequently.’[11] The noted poet and literary critic R.P. Blackmur drew on over one hundred and forty letters from Henry to Brooks to show very convincingly that ‘the brothers sympathized with each other’s views.’[12] ‘Both Brooks and Henry Adams considered the *Law* to be the central problem of their life.’[13] I will outline its central thesis shortly.

Henry and Brooks were of different dispositions. Henry was content to adopt a detached and indifferent, almost amused, posture as the world burned. However, Brooks, as Charles Hirschfield explained, ‘like many determinists’:

> He was emotionally unable to accept the outcome of his intellectual analysis. He was therefore moved to active intervention in the process to prevent, or at least delay, its consummation. His inherited sense of duty, romantic bent, and a deep yearning for order and unity impelled him to this. … Adams actively engaged in politics, pulled wires, published six books and over fifty articles, made speeches, taught law students for nine years, fought James J. Hill, the railroad

> colossus, and served in the constitutional convention of his own state—all the while sounding the alarm and exhorting his fellow Americans to act before it was too late. … Roosevelt's advent to the presidency put Brooks Adams in a position of influence he had never enjoyed before, and he tried to use it to the utmost. The actual extent of his influence is, however, impossible to determine. Roosevelt now had a better opinion of his friend's sanity and invited him regularly to the White House for dinner. He asked for Adams's advice, always got it, and sometimes took it.[14]

While we should not overstate Adams's influence on Roosevelt, there is certainly plenty of evidence that, while 'out of office himself, he still had the pleasure of knowing and advising men who were in'.[15] Four years before he became President, while still New York City Police Commissioner, Roosevelt had written a fifteen-page review of the *Law* in 1897. While he took issue with some specifics, it is clear that Roosevelt was largely a sympathetic reader and found the material 'not merely interesting but soul-stirring'. Where Adams himself was pessimistic about the future prospects of the West—'*The Law* ends with a prophecy of doom. The cycle would not swing round once again'[16]—Roosevelt took it as an alarm bell to do something about it. He ends the review with a rousing call to action: 'If our population decreases; if we lose the virile, manly qualities, and sink into a nation of mere hucksters, putting gain above national honor, and subordinating everything to mere ease of life; then we shall indeed reach a condition worse than that of the ancient civilizations in the years of their decay.'[17] It seems that Adams was somewhat persuaded by this and gave Roosevelt his full support: from surviving correspondence, we know his advice tended towards encouraging Roosevelt to take history by the nettle and to embody the heroic values of the past; even if, in the long run, America was destined to decline, it would not go down without a fight. In this respect, Adams became an unlikely champion and intellectual architect of Roosevelt's 'New Nationalism'. When the President gave his speech urging for such a nationalism in 1910, the phrases and intellectual machinery bore the unmistakable stamp of Brooks Adams: 'I do not ask for overcentralization; but I do ask that we work in a spirit of broad and far-reaching nationalism when we work for what concerns our people as a

whole. We are all Americans. Our common interests are as broad as the continent. I speak to you here in Kansas exactly as I would speak in New York or Georgia, for the most vital problems are those which affect us all alike.'[18] 'We find the terms of Brooks Adams occurring constantly in Roosevelt's … speeches and writings … They provide an orientation toward a reviving nationalism, toward the "soldierly virtues" which Roosevelt nowadays admired, and seem to rationalize the increasingly critical spirit (among the new Hamiltonians) toward the crass commercialism of the age.'[19]

Let us now turn to the *Law* itself. Initially published in 1895, the enthusiasm of Roosevelt notwithstanding, it largely fell on deaf ears, especially from the academy which almost entirely ignored it. 'There are some books which run so counter to the prevailing tendencies, or influences, of the society in which they appear, that it is possible, in spite of the many great qualities that they may possess, for something approaching a conspiracy of silence to develop against them and gradually bury them in oblivion.'[20] However, it was republished in 1943 with a lengthy introduction by the famed historian Charles A. Beard, and—perhaps owing to the devastation of the two world wars, the second of which was still raging at the time of reissue—this time it seemed, at least for a time, to find a new audience.[21] By this point reviewers could recognise Adams's importance to intellectual history and spotted their own similarities with other Prophets of Doom: 'Brooks Adams resembled the Italian philosopher Vico, as he foreshadowed the German Spengler, in his ingenious use of historical parallels.'[22] We will doubtless recognise aspects of both Carlyle and Gobineau as well.

Adams, like Vico, sees history as fundamentally cyclical, interspersing periods of heroism and civilisation with barbarisms; like Carlyle, he sees history as a set of oscillations between 'poetic' and rationalist epochs; and, like Gobineau, he sees an 'energy', spirit, or as he puts it 'martial blood' that drives a people when they are at their most vital.[23] For Adams, most human action was non-rational, which is to say driven by instinctual and primal drives—similar to the sentiments in the work of Vilfredo Pareto.[24] However, for Adams, there are two motivational emotions stronger than any other: fear and greed. He wrote to William James the following: 'the deepest passion of the human mind is fear. Fear of the unseen, the spiritual world, represented by the priest; fear of the tangible world, represented by

the soldier. It is the conflict between these forces which has made civilisation.'[25] When cultures are still relatively primitive and simple —'decentralised'—during their upwards trajectory, fear is the dominant motive. This is roughly analogous to the periods covered by the Age of Gods and Age of Heroes in Vico, the 'poetic' periods in Carlyle, and the times in which the 'chivalric man' rule in Gobineau. However, once safety produces enough prosperity, or as he puts it 'stored energy',[26] the civilisational process centralises and gives way to a different type of spirit marked by money-making, usury, and, above all, greed. This increased centralisation exhausts energy rather than accumulates it, and once that energy is all used up, the husk that is left can no longer sustain the civilisation and so collapse and a return to barbarism beckons.

Let us examine several attempts by critics and scholars to summarise the *Law*, I will provide an extra gloss where necessary:

> The thesis of the book was that history alternated between cycles of civilization and decay, corresponding to the concentration or dissipation of energy. In the movement toward civilization, Brooks contended, the imagination of man is stimulated, and society produces religious, military, and artistic types of leaders. But when the economy becomes ripe, he continued, greed is stimulated, and society produces Commercial and self-serving types. At this juncture, civilization begins the downward spiral toward barbarism. Brooks's theory of history challenged the prevailing American belief in linear progress, voluntarism, and optimism.[27]

This is largely correct: all that is missing is that the process of the 'downward spiral' seeks to keep itself going for as long as possible by conquering and assimilating new stocks of barbarians 'to secure the inflow of blood from without'.[28] This has an uncanny resemblance to the process of miscegenation and eventual dwindling of energy we find in Gobineau. Let us continue:

> In the first age, the first phase of the cycle, institutions are loose and weak and the 'imaginative man' leads society, expressing himself in religion and in war; fear is the dominant urge in this age. In the second age, the second phase of the

> cycle, there is a process of centralization and the ‘economic man’ attains to leadership, expressing himself in science and in business, especially in currency manipulation; greed has now become the dominant urge. The ‘law’ of civilization compels a society to move from the first into the second phase of the cycle and then, continuing to operate, becomes a law of decay, as economic man, in his climactic type, the ‘usurer,’ gradually starves his fellows until their vitality is destroyed. Thereupon new ‘races’ appear and the cyclical process is repeated *ad infinium*.[29]

This, again, is mostly correct. The only key detail missing is that for various reasons, as I have already briefly mentioned, Adams believed that *this* time there would be no regeneration for the West and that the cycle will be effectively over once America and Europe collapse. He had three reasons for this. The first is technology: he believed that a ‘wage-earning police’ has put modern elites ‘beyond attack’ and that this political innovation has rendered the legions of old ‘a toy’. Second, he believed there were no more barbarians to inject new blood and energy into failing systems.[30] Third, he believed the logic of usurious capitalism was such that it had now become for the first time truly global and would seek out the cheapest costs in labour markets, and that, in this respect, the supremacy of Asia over Europe would be inevitable in the long-run. The relative birth rates between Asia and Europe would ensure that Europe would ‘run out of energy’ first—a fascinating prediction given the meteoric rise of China over the past half a century and, at the time of writing, the USA’s increasingly desperate inability to maintain a unipolar world as global hegemon.

Finally, let us consider the summary of Adams’s friend Roosevelt:

> During the earlier stages of this movement the imaginative man —the man who stands in fear of a priesthood—is, in his opinion, the representative type, while with him and almost equally typical stand the soldier and the artist. As consolidation advances, the economic man—the man of industry, trade, and capital—tends to supplant the emotional and artistic types of manhood, and finally himself develops along two lines,—‘the usurer in his most formidable aspect, and the peasant whose nervous system is best adapted to thrive on scanty nutriment.’

> These two very unattractive types are in his belief the inevitable final products of all civilization, as civilization has hitherto developed; and when they have once been produced there follows either a stationary period, during which the whole body politic gradually ossifies and atrophies, or else a period of utter disintegration.[31]

It is important to note that, for Adams, the rise of the hated financier and usurer is not unique to the modern age but has parallels in Ancient Rome (in fact he starts the book outlining the brutal usurious practices of the patricians against the plebians circa 400 BC) as well as in the Renaissance period of Europe, especially in England under the Tudors.[32]

Just as Carlyle and Gobineau looked back to the chivalric medieval era for inspiration, so too did Adams: 'His interpretation enthroned the ideals he saw as represented by the monk and the crusader, and cast "economic man"—the merchant, the entrepreneur, the banker—as history's Antichrist.' However, just as in Vico, the man born in the decrepit Age of Greed was not able to embody these ideals: 'The ideals that the Gothic represented for him were not reproducible in or adaptable to the modern age; in fact, they stood in the historical memory as wrenching harbingers of inevitable decay.'[33] One can gain a sense of the genuine emotional excitement and sense of wonder Adams felt by some of his descriptions of medieval struggles, such as King Henry IV's conflict with Pope Gregory VII during the Investiture Controversy at the time of the Great Saxon Revolt:

> To Henry's soldiers the world was a vast space peopled by those fantastic beings which are still seen on Gothic towers. These demons obeyed the monk of Rome, and his army melting from the Emperor under a nameless horror, left him helpless. Gregory lay like a magician in the fortress of Canossa; but he had no need of carnal weapons, for when the emperor reached the Alps he was almost alone. Then his imagination took fire, the panic seized him, and he sued for mercy.[34]

Roosevelt, who personally highlighted this passage in praise of Adams, also seemed to have an in-born sense of this spirit himself, and understood

exactly why fear of this sort could not be reproduced in the Age of Greed:

> Moreover, there is a certain softness of fibre in civilized nations which, if it were to prove progressive, might mean the development of a cultured and refined people quite unable to hold its own in those conflicts through which alone any great race can ultimately march to victory. There is also a tendency to become fixed, and to lose flexibility. Most ominous of all, there has become evident, during the last two generations, a very pronounced tendency among the most highly civilized races, and among the most highly civilized portions of all races, to lose the power of multiplying, and even to decrease; so much so as to make the fears of the disciples of Malthus a century ago seem rather absurd to the dweller in France or New England to-day.[35]

Although it might seem contradictory for Adams and for Roosevelt to attempt to embody heroism despite this recognition, they sought to redirect 'energy' back towards America using policies that we would today call 'protectionist'.

Adams contrasted the spirit of the Age of Fear and its noble ideals with the spirit of the Age of Greed with its petty, low, and materialist ones:

> The soldier-hero, the religious enthusiast, the loyal retainer (creatures of the age of fear) are ennobled by [Walter] Scott, and the attributes which characterize them [Brooks Adams] believed, derive from a decentralized, rural, policeless society. Only the courageous and the physically strong can flourish in this kind of world. But when these conditions disappear, Adams continues, with the rise of the industrial community in the eighteenth century, a new and timid social stratum comes to power (creatures of the age of greed), differing from the preceding one as the organism of the ox from the wolf. Charles Dickens is its chronicler. … Adams ranged the idealized types from the age of faith against the mercenary and unheroic figures of his own day. He deplored this world of Dickens, a world devoid of statesmanship, of art, of manners, of adventure, even while he traced its inevitability. Hence his

> attacks against plutocrats, bankers, Jews—collectively subsumed in the word ‘gold-bug’, the quintessence of everything vile and rotten in his generation.[36]

Of course, with the invocation of Dickens directly, we are only at one degree of separation from Carlyle. His descriptions of ‘gold-bugs’ should be understood first and foremost as ‘poetic conceptions personifying the forces of commerce’: ‘the spirit of the modern, the genii of money’, very similar to Carlyle’s laments against the ‘cash-nexus’, ‘Cash-Gospel’, or the ‘Gospel of Mammon’.[37] This corresponds almost perfectly, also, to the spirit of Vico’s Age of Men, especially during the Barbarism of Reflection, and to the preferences of Gobineau’s ‘practical men’ who always prefer comfort and conformity to the higher ideals of the chivalric man.

The most elegant articulation of Adams’s *Law* was by his brother, Henry, who reproduced it almost as a logical proof in one of his many letters to Brooks:

- All Civilisation is Centralisation.
- All Centralisation is Economy.
- Therefore all Civilisation is the survival of the most economical (cheapest).
- Under an economical centralisation, Asia is cheaper than Europe.
- The world tends to economic centralisation.
- Therefore Asia tends to survive, and Europe tends to perish.[38]

At the present time, when many political commentators track the machinations of ‘globalist’ elites who gather at the World Economic Forum at Davos to plan new and ingenuous ways to ration our energy consumption during an ‘energy crisis’, while rising powers such as Russia, China, and India become ever more non-compliant to the increasingly absurd demands of a West that has lost all moral authority, these prophetic lines will not provide much comfort. ‘All that lay ahead was collapse and displacement as the center of global capital.’[39] Brooks Adams came to believe with Theodore Roosevelt, despite himself and despite the more total pessimism of his brother, Henry, that something *could* be done. That there were men like Roosevelt to find the will and courage, perhaps a different outcome

would be possible. Today, the world waits for new men of courage amid of a sea of abject cowardice and greed, although it is difficult to see any on the horizon.

1 Daniel Aaron, 'The Unusable Man: An Essay on the Mind of Brooks Adams', *The New England Quarterly*, 21:1 (March 1948), pp. 3, 6.

2 Matthew Josephson, *The President Makers: The Culture of Politics and Leadership in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1896–1916* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), p. 25.

3 Mina J. Carson, 'The Evolution of Brooks Adams', *Biography*, 6:2 (Spring 1983), pp. 95–116.

4 Dan R. Bieri, *Brooks Adams and His Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana, 1964), unpublished thesis, p. 5.

5 Charles Hirschfield, 'Brooks Adams and American Nationalism', *The American Historical Review*, 69:2 (January 1964), pp. 373–374.

6 Paul C. Nagel, 'Brooks Adams after Half a Century', *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 90 (1978), pp. 38–57.

7 Charles A. Madison, 'Brooks Adams: Jeremian Critic of Capitalism', *The Antioch Review*, 4:3 (Autumn 1944), pp. 398–413.

8 Quoted in Nagel, 'Brooks Adams after Half a Century', p. 41.

9 Hirschfield, 'Brooks Adams and American Nationalism', p. 371.

10 Timothy Paul Donovan, *Henry and Brooks Adams: The Search for a Law* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma), unpublished thesis, p. 36.

11 Quoted in William A. Williams, 'Brooks Adams and American Expansion', *The New England Quarterly*, 25:2 (June 1952), p. 220.

12 R.P. Blackmur, 'Henry and Brooks Adams: Parallels to Two Generations', *The Southern Review*, 5 (Autumn 1939), pp. 313–316.

13 Williams, 'Brooks Adams and American Expansion', p. 218.

14 Hirschfield, 'Brooks Adams and American Nationalism', pp. 373, 380.

15 Aaron, 'The Unusable Man', p. 6.

16 Carson, 'The Evolution of Brooks Adams', p. 103.

17 Theodore Roosevelt, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*', *The Forum*, 22:5 (January 1897), pp. 583, 589.

18 Theodore Roosevelt, 'The New Nationalism' (31 August 1910), in *The Selected Speeches and Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Gordon Hunter (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), pp. 98–99.

19 Josephson, *The President Makers*, p. 26.

20 Donald J. Pierce, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*', *Political Science Quarterly*, 58:3 (September, 1943), p. 437.

21 Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, 2nd edn. (1895; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943).

22 Josephson, *The President Makers*, p. 26.

23 Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, p. 335.

24 See my summary of this in Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022), pp. 26–37.

25 Quoted in Aaron, 'The Unusable Man', p. 8.

26 Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, p. 297.

27 Gary Marotta, 'The Economics of American Empire: The View of Brooks Adams and Charles Arthur Conant', *The American Economist*, 19:2 (Fall 1975), pp. 34–37.

28 Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, p. 90.

29 Rushton Coulborn, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History*', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (October 1943), p. 77.

30 Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, pp. 327, 293.

31 Roosevelt, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*', p. 577.

32 Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, pp. 62–86, 200–225.

33 Carson, 'The Evolution of Brooks Adams', pp. 96, 103.

34 Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, p. 118.

35 Roosevelt, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*', p. 579.

36 Aaron, 'The Unusable Man', pp. 10–11.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

38 Quoted in Blackmur, 'Henry and Brooks Adams', p. 317.

39 Matthew W. Slaboch, *The Road to Nowhere: The Idea of Progress and Its Critics* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p. 85.

# *6: Oswald Spengler*

Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), ‘the greatest of the modern prophets of doom’,[1] lived his life largely in solitude. He studied at Halle and wrote his doctoral dissertation on Heraclitus. After initially failing to pass his viva, he finally passed it and took his PhD in 1904. He worked for a period as a teacher before resigning in 1911. He lived in Munich for the rest of his life. His mother had died in 1910 and left him a small inheritance from which he lived for the next decade supplemented by writing reviews and short articles. He did not serve during the First World War because of poor health. Since his funds were wrapped up in foreign securities, he fell into severe financial difficulties because he was no longer receiving any interest on them. It was during this period that he wrote the first volume of his masterpiece, and one of the most famous non-fiction books of the twentieth century, *The Decline of the West* (1918–22) (hereafter the *Decline*). ‘During the war years, Spengler lodged in a dreary slum, took his meals in cheap working-class restaurants, and wrote much of the *Decline* by candle-light.’[2] Capturing the grim zeitgeist of Germany in the aftermath of the war in 1918, the first volume sold more than 30,000 copies, a spectacular success for such a dense tome. This ‘dramatically improved the position of its financially strapped author’.[3] By 1926, both volumes had sold 100,000 copies.[4] Although popular, Spengler never found acceptance in any scholarly community and remained a somewhat solitary figure. Nonetheless, he was read and admired by many figures associated with the Conservative Revolution in Germany during the inter-war period and with German youth groups. In the 1920s, he turned his hand to more political writings, which include *Prussianism and Socialism* (1920), *Man and Technics* (1931), and *The Hour of Decision* (1933). The last of these was not only popular, selling 150,000 copies in 1933 alone,[5] but also brought him ‘into open conflict with the Nazis’,[6] and it was later banned for its critiques of National Socialism. The reclusive Spengler, who had been an intellectual hero to many young German conservatives, met Adolf Hitler after a personal invitation; after some hours of discussion, Spengler concluded that Hitler was an idiot. Nonetheless, he became a senator at the

German Academy in 1933 and died of a heart attack three years later. He had bought thousands of books and a sizable collection of ancient Turkish, Persian, and Indian weapons.

While Spengler's political development is interesting, our concern here must be confined to the *Decline* and specifically what distinguishes it from what we have already seen in Vico, Carlyle, Gobineau, and Adams, none of whom are referenced in its gargantuan 1,200 pages. In the preface of the 1922 edition, Spengler says, 'I feel urged to name once more those to whom I owe practically everything: Goethe and Nietzsche. Goethe gave me the method, Nietzsche the questioning faculty.'[7] What is striking, despite this, is how many similarities Spengler has to the earlier Prophets of Doom: the general shape of his seasonal cycle strongly mirrors Vico; his view of the role of merchants and money echoes both Carlyle and Adams; his absolute cultural relativism chimes exactly with Gobineau's notion that 'civilisation is incommunicable'. Before getting to the specifics of these three distinctive features of Spengler in detail, there are also more generic common features. He shares with all of them a special affinity for the Gothic period, the Germanic medieval era. 'The culture that Spengler valorised was German *Kultur*.'[8] For Spengler, 'Germanic-Catholic Christianity, forms the well-spring of Christian culture.'[9] And he shares another common strain we have seen which is a 'poetic' treatment of history. The great literary critic Northrop Frye wrote: 'If *The Decline of the West* were nothing else, it would still be one of the world's great Romantic poems.'[10] Spengler 'believed that "to write history is to write poetry".'[11] 'In this new orientation, the historian ceases to be a scientist and becomes a poet.'[12] The historian James T. Shotwell wrote, intending it as a criticism of Spengler's work: 'This is mythmaking, it is poetry.'[13]

What does this mean, exactly? Two characteristic passages from Spengler should illustrate the point.

> Regard the flowers at eventide as, one after the other, they close in the setting sun. Strange is the feeling that then presses in upon you—a feeling of enigmatic fear in the presence of this blind dreamlike earth-bound existence. The dumb forest, the silent meadows, this bush, that twig, do not stir themselves, it is the wind that plays with them. Only the little gnat is free—he dances still in the evening light, he moves whither he will. A plant is nothing on its own account. It forms a part of the

> landscape in which a chance made it take root. The twilight, the chill, the closing of every flower—these are not cause and effect, not danger and willed answer to danger. They are a single process of nature, which is accomplishing itself near, with, and in the plant. The individual is not free to look out for itself, will for itself, or choose for itself.[14]

From this description of flowers, gnats, and plants, Spengler advances his argument, by way of metaphor and analogy, to consider human cultures and civilisations in similar terms. But also note Spengler's use of elevated language and his elegiac tone, which has a 'poetic' style of its own. In another beautiful passage, he writes:

> With the formed state, high history also lays itself down weary to sleep. Man becomes a plant again, adhering to the soil, dumb and enduring. The timeless village and the 'eternal' peasant reappear, begetting children and burying seed in Mother Earth. … There, in the souls, world-peace, the peace of God, the bliss of grey-haired monks and hermits, is become actual and there alone. It has awakened that depth in the endurance of suffering which the historical man in the thousand years of his development has never known. Only with the end of grand History does holy, still Being reappear. It is a drama noble in its aimlessness, noble and aimless as the course of the stars, the rotation of the earth, and alternance of land and sea, of ice and virgin forest upon its face. We may marvel at it or we may lament it—but it is there.[15]

This is a treatment of history that reaches beyond the mere antiquarian, Carlyle's Dryasdust, to try to capture something that cannot be measured or precisely quantified. He wrote 'in the German historicist tradition of antipositivism'.[16] He was echoing 'a deep German tradition of rejecting English science, a tradition that originated in the eighteenth century'.[17] Here 'History is not a bewildering chaos of interacting causes and effects but the symbolic unfolding of a deeper metaphysical reality.'[18] The common thread that links Spengler at least to Carlyle and Adams in this

view of history is the influence of Goethe, who had been gifted a copy of Vico's *New Science* by an enthusiastic student.[19]

The 'poetic' element in Spengler is not merely incidental to the work, the entire arguments rests on the strength of the analogy between a society and a living organism:

> In Spengler's poetical conception this culture is an organism like a plant. He sees all cultures as plants, deeply rooted in the mother soil, from which they grow and blossom and in which they fade and die. They die, and others, in this eternal cycle of birth and death, rise in sublime aimlessness, to grow and die in their turn. It is when a culture has passed its zenith that the era of civilization begins. Civilization is the fate, the end and debris of cultural history. Specifically, the West entered into this last gray, darkening phase only after the French Revolution. Now mankind, deadly tired, prepares for the end, for winter and death.[20]

The model is somewhat deterministic, and Spengler did not believe anything could be done about the fate of civilisation. Instead, we must play our part in the historical process. Spengler 'invited his readers to take a "realistic" approach toward the limited possibilities of the aging Western culture, to accept the inevitable outcome of the history of the next generations, and to do their best within the limits of the possible instead of fighting lost battles for ideals long dead, while fully realizing that "optimism is cowardice"'.[21]

In what is still the best monograph on Spengler, an amazed H. Stuart Hughes could find no evidence that Spengler had read any of his obvious predecessors:

> There is no word in the *Decline* of … Vico—although it seems incredible that Spengler did not know at least something of *The New Science*, which by his day had become a familiar part of the German educational program. Of the brothers [Brooks and Henry] Adams, Spengler was obviously and understandably ignorant. … [August] Albers, who knew a good deal about Spengler's writing habits, reports that his friend did not even

> know the titles of many of the books from which his critics accused him of stealing his ideas.[22]

This is more remarkable given how closely Spengler's 'seasons' map onto Vico's Three Ages, but perhaps explained partly by Vico's influence on Goethe:

> [Goethe] said that the work [*New Science*] had been handed to him 'as though it were a sacred thing' and that it contained 'prophetic insights on the subject of the good and the just that we shall or must attain in the future, insights based on sober meditation about life and about the future.' Convinced by the strength of Vico's demonstration, Goethe henceforth believed that the evolution of humanity should be represented not by a continually ascending line but by a spiral.[23]

In Goethe we see a generally pessimistic view of history,[24] and cyclical narratives.[25] The influence of Goethe on Spengler is so profound that it is safe to say that whatever influence Vico had on Goethe was inherited through osmosis by Spengler. Just as in Vico, in Spengler, a civilisation starts to die as soon as the 'Barbarism of Reflection' begins to deconstruct the religious and moral spirit that had built the culture. Spengler adds a distinction between what he calls the 'culture' (*Kultur*) phase and the 'civilisation' (*Zivilisation*) phase of a given people. The culture phase corresponds to the Spring, Summer, and Autumn seasons, while the civilisation phase corresponds to the Winter season. In Vico's terms: the Spring represents the Age of Gods; the Summer, the Age of Heroes; the Autumn—coinciding with Plato and Aristotle in the classical civilisation, and with Locke, Descartes, and Rousseau in our current one—represents the transition into the Age of Men; and the Winter, the inevitable (but long) unravelling that follows the 'Barbarism of Reflection'.

R.G. Collingwood, in an otherwise famously hostile review, provided an excellent summary of Spengler's general pattern of the seasons:

> Every culture has its spring, its dawning phase, economically based on rural life and spiritually recognizable by a rich mythological imagination expressing in epic and legend the whole world-view which, later, is to be developed in

> philosophical and scientific form. Then follows its summer, at once a revolt against the mythology and scholasticism of the spring and their continuation; a period in which a young and vigorous urban intelligence pushes religion into the background and brings to the fore a strictly scientific form of consciousness. The autumn of the culture pushes this consciousness to its limit, while at the same time it sees the decay of religion and the impoverishment of inward life; rationalism, enlightenment, are its obvious marks. Last comes winter, the decay of culture and the reign of civilization the materialistic life of the great cities, the cult of science only so far as science is useful, the withering of artistic and intellectual creativeness, the rise of academic and professional philosophy, the death of religion, and the drying-up of all the springs of spiritual life.[26]

For Spengler, as for Vico, our current civilisation started some centuries after the Fall of Rome and coincides with the Christianisation of Europe. The period from 476 to 900 is properly understood, according to Spengler, as the Winter season of the classical Roman—or 'Apollonian'—civilisation. This period is 'a kind of twilight era',[27] which is 'pre-cultural', insomuch as it comes after the tumults of the early Winter period. Our civilisation, which he calls 'Faustian', does not begin its culture phase until the 900s, as follows:

> Culture phase
> Spring: Gothic period (900–1500)
> Summer: Baroque period (1500–1684)
> Autumn: Enlightenment (1685–1788)
>
> Civilisation phase
> Winter: now (1789–??)

Each of the two phases lasts for roughly a thousand years, but these periods could be shorter or longer for any variety of reasons. As can be seen above, the 'seasons' can be long or short. For Faustian culture, Spring spans six hundred years, while Summer and Autumn are less than two hundred years each. The Spring, as in Vico's Age of Gods, sees the birth of myth, it is 'dream-heavy', driven by fear (as in Adams's Age of Fear), and a 'new

God-feeling'. This becomes formalised as a scholasticism which then gives way to the 'ripening consciousness' of Summer, which is marked by internal polar oppositions, the need to rationalise, and a puritanism that empties the religion of its mysticism. It gives rise to a 'critical protest against the uncritical intuitiveness of the Spring'.[28] This, in turn, gives way to the Autumn, the zenith of intellectual creativeness, which has the unfortunate effect of sapping the culture of its remaining vitality, its spiritual creativity, and ushering in the Winter season. 'As economic, technological, military, and political concerns and prowess supplant philosophical and aesthetic endeavours, a culture can be said to have entered its "winter" or civilization phase.'[29] 'Napoleon in the western culture marks the exact point of transition from autumn to winter, from culture proper to civilization; the break-up of the state proper and the beginning of imperialism, the victory of the great city over the country, the triumph of money over politics.'[30] Spengler's Winter season is almost identical to Vico's Age of Men, Carlyle's 'Latter Days', and Adams's Age of Greed.

Thus, we see in Spengler the same railing against capitalism and the 'universal cash-nexus' or 'Cheap and Nasty' that we see in Carlyle and Adams. For him:

> What really matters—pride, discipline, will—cannot be quantified or measured. Indeed, Spengler scorns the enumerating spirit manifested in economics and capitalism, calling for a 'battle of blood and tradition against mind and money.' He sought to revitalise the German spirit by decoupling its anti-capitalism from its suspicion of technology.[31]

The *Decline* paints a picture of the transition of a largely rural pre-state society, as seen during the Gothic feudal era when 'the spirit of the countryside' reigned, to the dominance of the city and the state and the prevalence of the mass man. During the Winter phase, the 'money-power' comes to dominate everything. Spengler was 'particularly critical of what he calls [following Werner Sombart] the "department-store ethics" of Herbert Spencer. … from the perspective of the "heroic" worldview, "life is not the highest value". … [*The Decline of the West*] appears to advocate the heroic, soldierly acceptance of death over … the "merchant" ethos of

wanting to live forever.'[32] Spengler foresaw the rise of Caesarism as an antidote to the dominance of the merchants who use liberal democracy to mask their dominance. 'The dictatorship of money had used democracy as its political weapon.'[33] 'Extrapolating these trends into prophecies of a grim future: the disintegration of order amongst the rootless mass of nomads who inhabit our overgrown cities, the loss of empire brought about by the declining energies of the imperial powers, and the emergent clash between money (acquisitive capitalism and liberal democracy) and blood (violent "Caesarism" or military despotism).'[34]

It was largely owing to the accuracy of this prediction that Spengler enjoyed such success during the inter-war period and during the Second World War. As one critic put it, 'Spengler's conception of Caesarism foreshadowed the growth of the totalitarian religions of our time.'[35] In this reading, the dictators of the 1920s and 1930s across Europe—Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain, Hitler in Germany, and so on—were the fulfilment of Spengler's prophecy. By the same token, after the war, given that the Allied forces of 'liberal democracy' won, Spengler, at least for a period, fell out of fashion. He briefly came back into vogue during the stagflation years of the 1970s, and then out of fashion again until relatively recently as the late 2010s and early 2020s have been generally a time of turmoil and economic downturn. However, in Spengler's conception there is not simply one wave of Caesars, but numerous waves. Just as Rome had Julius Caesar, there will also come the equivalents of Augustus, Tiberius, Vespasian, Trajan, and so on. The process must continue until the final victory of force-politics over money.

Hughes provides a succinct outline of Spengler's basic prediction for what the future holds—given that this is a synthesis of many hundreds of pages—the passage is still quite long and it will be necessary to quote it in full:

> Life will have descended to a level of general uniformity, in which local and national differences will have virtually ceased to exist. The only places that will matter will be a handful of world cities—the 'megalopolis,' like New York or Berlin, as opposed to the eighteenth-century city of culture, which still retained some connection with a living tradition. These 'barrack-cities' will be what Hellenistic Alexandria and imperial Rome were to the ancient world—vast assemblages of

> people living all on top of each other, a shiftless mob, willing to obey any leader who will keep them amused. Their life will be a meaningless repetition of purely mechanical tasks and vulgar, brutal diversions. Even intellectual activity will have become mechanized, practical, cold, and merely 'clever.' The educated will have lost their feeling for language, and the same 'basic' speech—what Toynbee would call a 'lingua franca'—will be on the lips of intellectuals and common laborers alike. … Eventually, when every trace of form and style will have disappeared, a new primitivism will begin to pervade all human activity. Even the feeling for scientific norms—which will have survived the dissolution of culture—will grow vague and uncertain. Men will be ready to believe anything; they will regain their appetite for the mysterious and the supernatural. In vulgar credulity, they will find an escape from the universal drabness and mechanization. Out of the desolation of the cities there will arise a 'second religiosity,' a fusion of popular cults and the memories of nearly forgotten piety. The patient, uncomprehending masses will have found a solace for their miseries.[36]

Here, again, we can recognise many features that echo Vico, including the notion of a second barbarism, a new religiosity forming, and the cycle starting afresh. Although what 'new' culture is born will be recognisably distinct from that which preceded it: an epistemic break ushering in an era in which the old, now dead civilisation, remains only as a reminder of some lost epoch.

This brings us to the third distinctive feature of Spengler: his absolute insistence on cultural relativism, which is curiously close to Gobineau's idea that 'civilisation is incommunicable'. Spengler viewed this as a tremendous innovation akin to the shift from Ptolemy to Copernicus. Rather than viewing history from the lens of a Eurocentric present in which all roads lead inevitably and inextricably 'to us', Spengler saw each civilisation as its own nucleus and centre of gravity which is so totalising that it cannot comprehend other civilisations on their own terms but only from its own frames of reference. This extreme relativism is both diachronic, which is to say that the civilisation that precedes the current one is distinct and

hermetically sealed from it, and synchronic, which is to say that any current civilisation is incompatible with any other current civilisation that is on the map. A simpler way of putting it might be to say that 'civilisation is incommunicable' across both time and space, historically and, in the present, geographically. 'No value can survive beyond the civilisation that produced it. Values are perishable, there are no absolute truths; every truth is relative to the context of the civilisation that posits it, and when the latter is exhausted, the concept of truth also crumbles, shatters. The very idea of progress is nothing but an illusion.'[37] 'Any real intercultural dialog or fusion is considered as thoroughly impossible.'[38] 'For him, every culture is just radically different from every other, based on its own idea and not on the idea of any but itself. Each culture is wholly self-enclosed; within its limits, it proceeds on a type-pattern exactly like that of the rest, but this similarity of structure is its only relation to the rest.'[39] 'These cultures are mutually incomprehensible. The members of one culture cannot understand the basic ideas of another and when they think they are doing so, they are actually translating totally alien concepts into concepts they have developed on their own. Nor do cultures "influence" each other in any of the usual senses of the term. What look like borrowings are simply the outer forms of art or public activity, into which the borrowing culture has poured a new content.' Thus, for example, the neoclassicism of the Renaissance, in Spengler's view, 'failed utterly' and the early moderns 'proved to be Faustian in spite of themselves'.[40]

This makes more sense perhaps when one considers that Spengler believed that each culture or civilisation had its own animating spirit which conforms to a single concept or principle. E.E. Sperry described this as a 'culture-soul':

> In looking backward over human history we find that it comprises various cultures, as the Egyptian, Indian, Classical, and Western. Each of these cultures is a vast, living, human organism, endowed with an ego, a personality, with a metaphysical structure, a culture-soul. The culture soul expresses itself in all the phenomena of its history, in peoples and nations, in language and literature, in government, science, the arts, and all other conceivable human manifestations. These are the expression forms of the soul and together constitute the

> culture. Through them the soul actualizes itself and history is thus a culture-soul in process of becoming.[41]

T.D. Campbell preferred to call it a ‘prime symbol’:

> His method is to discover the key symbols in terms of which it is possible to gather together and relate all the main features of a culture. Thus the prime symbol of the Classical culture is the ‘sensuously present individual body’, that of the West is ‘pure and limitless space’; Egyptian culture has as its prime symbol the ‘stone’ while that of the Magian is ‘cavernous, eternal, vaulted space’. These symbols are aids to the understanding of the characteristic science, philosophy, religion, art, and politics of their respective cultures, and their emergence, flourishing and decay represent the birth, maturity, and decline of that culture.[42]

A list of these ‘animating spirits’ or ‘culture-souls’ or ‘prime symbols’ of each of the high cultures or civilisation Spengler describes looks like this:

> Egyptian: predestined life-path
> Chinese: meandering life-path
> Indian: world as illusion, existential zero
> Magian: radical good/evil or light/dark dualism
> Apollonian: harmonious, fixed contours
> Faustian: longing for the unattainable, infinity

Note that Spengler lists the Babylonian and Mesoamerican civilisations too but gives very scant treatment to these and does not seem to elaborate on the nature of their culture-souls; he also posits a ninth culture that has yet to fully express itself, the Russian. The ‘Magian’ civilisation consists of the peoples of the Middle East, including the Persians, the Arabs, and the Jews. Thus, in Spengler’s estimation, early Christianity was ‘Magian’ and conformed to the binary good–evil or light–dark dualism of that civilisation, although it disguised itself initially in Apollonian garb through a process he calls *pseudomorphesis*. Another example of this is the Russians of the eighteenth and nineteenth century after Peter the Great, taking on European customs and modes of thinking and expression that were distinctly ‘not their own’. Since, for Spengler, civilisation is incommunicable, this

represented a Faustian distortion of Russia which it is still working through truly to express itself and discover the real nature of its own 'culture-soul'—which is somewhat interesting to contemplate at the present time when Russia under Vladimir Putin seems determined to prove Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* wrong—since the invasion of Ukraine, we can no longer say that no two nations with a McDonald's have ever been at war. [43]

As we discussed in Chapter 4 in the analysis of Gobineau, there is strong evidence that rather than 'Christianising' Europe, what actually took place is that Christianity was 'Germanised', that is, stripped of its original dualistic spirit and replaced with one 'truer' to the Faustian spirit that animates Europe. This was Spengler's view. For a period, roughly from the Fall of Rome to the tenth century, Magian elements sat uneasily side-by-side with nascent Faustian elements in the ashes of the old Apollonian civilisation. The Crusades represent the final expulsion of Magian influence from Europe and the birth of the Faustian culture.

> Its focal point is Christianity—not the original Church of the Magian world but virtually a new religion in which the dynamic morality of personal atonement and the intensely human cult of the Mother of God have driven out the gentle, tranquil ethic of selfless fellowship with Jesus exemplified in the primitive sacrament of baptism. This driving, aspiring faith gives to the springtime of the Faustian spirit a quality of high tension. Like its prototype in the Apollonian culture, the Homeric era—and here Spengler echoes Vico—the European Middle Ages overflow with the excitement of passionate deeds and spiritual discovery.[44]

If Spengler is right, this obviously has catastrophic implications for the current time and renders impossible the dream of cultural integration of disparate peoples in a globalised world. In his later work, *The Hour of Decision*, Spengler, in fact, warned of a 'coloured world-revolution', that Western Civilisation was threatened both 'from below' and 'from without' by '*class war and race war*'.[45] This phenomenon is not unique to Faustian civilisation but has faced prior civilisations also:

> Such a ‘revolution from without’ has set itself up against each of the past Cultures also. It has arisen invariably among the hopeless and downtrodden races of the outer ring—‘savages’ or ‘barbarians’—who are exploited without means of redress by the unassailable superiority of a group of Culture-nations which had reached high maturity in the political, military, economic, and intellectual forms and methods. This ‘colonial style’ is present in every High Culture.[46]

The subjugated foreigners start to question the superiority of the dominating cultures, and, as soon as they detect a weakening in their resolve to command, ‘they begin to reflect on the possibilities of attack and victory for themselves.’ Spengler provides many examples of when this has happened before in history in China, in the Middle East, and of course in Rome. When Spengler says ‘coloured’, he does not mean what we would call today ‘black’, but rather virtually all peoples who are not Western European, including those we would today think of as ‘white’, such as the Russians, who he argues ‘has again become an Asiatic “Mongolian” State’. Spengler predicts a great many things in *The Hour of Decision* that have since come to pass. For example, he predicts the Islamisation of Africa: ‘Where a Christian school stood yesterday, a mosque stands tomorrow. The warlike manly spirit of this religion is more intelligible to the Negro than the doctrine of pity, which merely takes away his respect for the whites.’[47] It is now estimated that 45 percent of Africans are Muslims. To give an indication of the rapidity of the increase, in 1990, Nigeria was 60 percent Christian and 25 percent Muslim. Today it is 53 percent Muslim and 46 percent Christian, or if you prefer, Islam has increased by 116 percent, while Christianity has decreased by 23 percent.[48] Spengler also predicts: ‘The white ruling nations have abdicated their former rank. They negotiate today where yesterday they would have commanded, and tomorrow they will have to flatter if they are even to negotiate.’[49] One thinks about the inability of the visibly elderly and barely sentient American President, Joe Biden, to enlist the support of Saudi Arabia, India, or China against the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Or internally, of the now familiar pandering of governments and institutions to minority groups who were formerly subjugated. At the time of writing, London has a Sunni Muslim of Pakistani origin as mayor, Sadiq

Khan, while the United Kingdom has a Hindu of Punjabi descent, Rishi Sunak, as Prime Minister—both of which would have been basically unthinkable when Spengler was writing in 1933.

Finally, Spengler gives a much fuller description of the process of how societies develop than Vico, or any of his predecessors, by outlining how feudal relations transform over time to the mass and scale of the modern state. In this, Spengler's thinking bears uncanny resemblance at times to the work of the classical elite theorists Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, whose ideas I outlined in *The Populist Delusion*.[50] As ever, there is no evidence that Spengler read either Mosca or Pareto, but nonetheless is fully cognisant of the principle that all real power is *de facto* not *de jure* power held by an organised minority over the disorganised mass. He says, 'in every healthy State the letter of the written constitution is of small importance compared with the practice of the living constitution':

> it does not matter whether the actual leader is called King or Minister or party-leader, or even (as in the case of Cecil Rhodes) that he has no defined relation to the State. The nobility which managed Roman politics in the period of the three Punic Wars had, from the point of view of constitutional law, no existence whatever. The leader's responsibility is always to a minority that possesses the instincts of statesmanship and represents the rest of the nation in the struggle of history.[51]

Related to this, and very often forgotten, is that Spengler's analysis of culture is always an analysis of its *high* culture, which is to say the prevailing attitudes of its elites. Spengler's analysis places as much emphasis on art history and architecture as it does on historical events. 'Society divides itself into two sections—the minority, whose thought has some meaning for the culture, and the majority, whose thought being non-existent has no meaning at all.'[52] Spengler's theory of the state is rooted in an analysis of the four estates. The first estate is the nobility, the second estate is the priesthood, the third estate is the burgher class or bourgeoisie, and the fourth estate is the mass. Note that the 'mass' is not the peasant. For Spengler, the peasantry is almost part of the soil itself, and has a common 'plant-like' bond with the nobility: 'peasantry is a piece of pure nature and growth and, therefore, a completely impersonal manifestation.' 'Nobility is

a higher peasantry. Even in 1250 the West had a widespread proverb: "One who ploughs in the forenoon jousts in the afternoon," and it was quite usual for a knight to marry the daughter of a peasant.' For Spengler, every culture in springtime takes the form of feudalism, with the second estate—the priesthood—acting as a symbolic counterweight. 'The noble is the *man as history*, the priest is the *man as nature*.'[53] He means by this that nobles must embody action in history, whereas the priest must embody contemplation. The specifics of what 'nature' constitutes differs from culture to culture but is determined by its 'prime symbol'. Thus, the priest in Faustian civilisation must attempt to keep the nobility oriented towards its longing for the unattainable or infinity. Spengler himself maintained a 'political commitment to the nobility—"man as history"—and its supposed values of chivalry, discipline, honour, self-denial and tradition'.[54]

However, every culture experiences a crisis in late Spring whereby the feudal order breaks down and gives way to the nascent state, initially under an absolutist monarchy but then falling eventually to the third estate and eventually the fourth estate:

> In opposition to [the old order] stand the intellectual powers of the now supreme city, *economy and science,* which in conjunction with the mass of artisans, functionaries, and labourers feel themselves as a party, diverse in its constituents, but invariably solid at the call to battle for freedom—that is, for urban independence of the great old-time symbols and the rights that flowed from them. As components of the Third Estate, which counts by heads and not by rank, they are all, in all Late periods of all Cultures, 'liberal' in one way or another —namely, free from the inward powers of non-urban life. Economy is freed to make money, science freed to criticize. And so in all the great decisions we perceive the intellect with its books and its meetings having the word ('Democracy'), and money obtaining the advantages ('Plutocracy')—and it is never ideas, but always capital, that wins.[55]

These twin forces, democracy and plutocracy, or, one might say, an unconstrained rationalism and an unconstrained money-power—replete with their own new elite classes, intellectuals (including scientists and technical experts) and financiers—are ultimately what kill the spirit of a

culture, transform it into a civilisation, and accelerate its decline and ultimate terminus:

> The Third Estate, without proper inward unity, was the non-estate—the protest, in estate-form, against the existence of estates; not against this or that estate, but against the symbolic view of life in general. It rejects all differences not justified by reason or practically useful. And yet it does mean something itself, and means it very distinctly—*the city-life as estate* in contradistinction to that of the country, *freedom as a condition* in contrast to attachment. But, looked at from within its own field, it is by no means the unclassified residue that it appears in the eyes of the primary estates. The bourgeoisie has definite limits; it belongs to the Culture; it embraces, in the best sense, all who adhere to it, and under the name of people, *populus, demos,* rallies nobility and priesthood, money and mind, craftsman and wage-earner, as constituents of itself. This is the idea that Civilization finds prevailing when it comes on the scene, and this is what it destroys by its notion of the Fourth Estate, *the Mass,* which rejects the Culture and its matured forms, lock, stock, and barrel. It is the absolute of formlessness, persecuting with its hate every sort of form, every distinction of rank, the orderliness of property, the orderliness of knowledge. It is the new nomadism of the Cosmopolis, for which slaves and barbarians in the Classical world, Sudras in the Indian, and in general anything and everything that is merely human, provide an undifferentiated floating something that falls apart the moment it is born, that recognizes no past and possesses no future. Thus the Fourth Estate becomes the expression of the passing of a history over into the history less. The mass is the end, the radical nullity.[56]

Casting our minds back to Chapter 1, we can recognise echoes in this analysis of both the degenerative cycle of the four ages *à la* Hesiod and the *Anacyclosis à la* Polybius. The coming of the rule of the mass is the end of all cycles, the *Kali Yuga*. Note also that the first and fourth estates (warriors/nobility, peasants/proletariat) are analogous to Pareto's 'lion'

archetype, while the second and third estates (priests/ intellectuals, merchants/bourgeoisie) are analogous to Pareto's 'foxes'.[57]

Spengler is clear that one of the reasons that the replacement of the nobility and priesthood with unconstrained money-power and unconstrained science or rationalistic intellectualism accelerates decline is because they attempt to replace 'facts' with ideals:

> But in the historical world there are no ideals, but only facts—no truths, but only facts. There is no reason, no honesty, no equity, no final aim, but only facts, and anyone who does not realize this should write books on politics—let him not try to *make* politics. In the real world there are no states built according to ideals, but only states that have *grown*, and these are nothing but living peoples 'in form.' No doubt it is 'the form impressed that living doth itself unfold,' but the impress has been that of the blood and beat of a being, wholly instinctive and involuntary; and as to the unfolding, if it is guided by the master of politics, it takes the direction inherent in the blood; if by the idealist, that dictated by his own convictions—in other words, the way to nullity.[58]

At the time of writing, 'ideals' have replaced 'facts' to the extent that the official functions of power can no longer honestly describe the difference between men and women, no longer distinguish between native and foreigner, no longer give any cogent reasons for why people should form families and have children, and no longer provide any coherent definition of what it is to belong to a nation. The abstractions of the remote city have replaced the rootedness in the soil of the familial castle. So long as the machine keeps ticking along, and all human life is sacrificed to that machine, so the city and the money-power are satisfied. '*A power can be overthrown only by another power*, not by a principle', 'money is overthrown and abolished only by blood', and thus 'the conflict *between* money and blood' is inevitable. While Spengler was a determinist insomuch as he saw that nothing could 'save' the West in the ultimate analysis, he regarded the victory of 'blood' over 'money' as 'necessary'. 'We do not have the freedom to reach to this or to that, but the freedom to do what is necessary or to do nothing.'[59] Since Spengler died in 1936 (no fan of Hitler and silenced by the Nazis), we cannot know whether he would have

regarded the outcome of the Second World War as the victory of money over blood, or whether he would argue that new Caesars must arise to take on the money-power again and again until its final defeat. What we do know is that since 1945, and especially since the final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the unchecked twin forces of unconstrained money-power and unconstrained rationalistic intellectualism have greatly accelerated the unravelling of Western civilisation to an extent that might have surprised even the man who told us that 'optimism is *cowardice*'.[60]

1 Hans W. Weigert, 'Oswald Spengler, Twenty-Five Years After', *Foreign Affairs*, 21:1 (October 1942), p. 120.

2 H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate*, rev. edn. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 5.

3 John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), p. 13.

4 James Joll, 'Two Prophets of the Twentieth Century: Spengler and Toynbee', *Review of International Studies*, 11 (1985), p. 91.

5 Ben Lewis, *Oswald Spengler and the Politics of Decline* (New York: Berghahn, 2022), p. 23.

6 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 122.

7 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols. (1922; London: Arktos, 2021), vol. 1, p. xix.

8 Ian James Kidd, 'Oswald Spengler, Technology, and Human Nature', *The European Legacy*, 17:1 (2012), p. 28.

9 Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, p. 32.

10 Northrop Frye, 'The Decline of the West by Oswald Spengler', *Daedalus*, 103:1 (Winter 1974), p. 6.

11 Weigert, 'Oswald Spengler, Twenty-Five Years After', p. 121.

12 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 71.

13 James T. Shotwell, 'Spengler', in *The Faith of An Historian and Other Essays: An Anthology* (New York: Walker and Company, 1964), p. 224.

14 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, p. 1.

15 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 560–561.

16 Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, p. 22.

17 Amory Stern, 'Faust without Mephistopheles: Oswald Spengler and the German Philosophy of Science', in *Conservative Revolution: Responses to Liberalism and Modernity*, ed. Troy Southgate (London: Black Front Press, 2022), vol. 2, p. 35.

18 Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, pp. 29–30.

19 Jules-Marie Chaix-Ruy, 'Giambattista Vico', *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 19 (1974), pp. 103–105. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Giambattista-Vico

20 Weigert, 'Oswald Spengler, Twenty-Five Years After', p. 123.

21 David Engels, 'Oswald Spengler and the Decline of the West', in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 12.

22 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, pp. 53–54.

23 Chaix-Ruy, 'Giambattista Vico', p. 105.

24 See Dominic Eggel, 'A Civilisation at Peril: Goethe's Representation of Europe during the *Sattelzeit'*, *European Review of History*, 21:6 (2013), pp. 871–888.

25 See Jane K. Brown, *Goethe's Cyclical Narratives* (Greensboro, NC: University of North Caroline Press, 1975).

26 R.G. Collingwood, 'Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycle', *Antiquity*, 1:3 (September 1927), pp. 311–312.

27 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 80.

28 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, p. 381.

29 Matthew W. Slaboch, *The Road to Nowhere: The Idea of Progress and Its Critics* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p. 90.

30 Collingwood, 'Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycle', p. 312.

31 Kidd, 'Oswald Spengler, Technology, and Human Nature', p. 27.

32 Stern, 'Faust without Mephistopheles', p. 47.

33 Weigert, 'Oswald Spengler, Twenty-Five Years After', p. 125.

34 T.D. Campbell, 'Oswald Spengler: The Approaching Death of Western Civilisation', *Futures*, 8:5 (October 1976), pp. 437–438.

35 Weigert, 'Oswald Spengler, Twenty-Five Years After', p. 124.

36 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 85.

37 Francesco Lamendola, 'The Last Triumphs of Money and the Machine in Oswald Spengler's Philosophy of History', in *Conservative Revolution: Responses to Liberalism and Modernity*, ed. Troy Southgate (London: Black Front Press, 2022), vol. 3, p. 73.

38 Engels, 'Oswald Spengler and the Decline of the West', p. 11.

39 Collingwood, 'Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycle' p. 317.

40 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, pp. 72–73, 81.

41 E.E. Sperry, 'Review of Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*', *The American Historical Review*, 32:4 (July 1927), p. 827.

42 Campbell, 'Oswald Spengler', p. 439.

43 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

44 Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 81.

45 Oswald Spengler, *The Hour of Decision: Germany and World Historical Evolution* (1933; Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), p. 204.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

47 *Ibid*., pp. 205, 208, 217.

48 Andrew McKinnon, 'Christians, Muslims and Traditional Worshippers in Nigeria: Estimating the Relative Proportions from Eleven Nationally Representative Social Surveys', *Review of Religious Research*, 63 (2021) pp. 303–315.

49 Spengler, *The Hour of Decision*, p. 210.

50 See Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022).

51 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, pp. 470–471.

52 E.H. Goddard and P.A. Gibbons, *Civilisation or Civilisations: An Essay on the Spenglerian Philosophy of History* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), p. 88.

53 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, pp. 422, 426, 428.

54 Lewis, *Oswald Spengler and the Politics of Decline*, p. 77.

55 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, p. 453.

56 *Ibid*., vol. 2, pp. 456–457.

57 See Parvini, *The Populist Delusion*, pp. 26–37.

58 Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, p. 469.

59 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 647–648.

60 Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (1931; London: Arktos, 2015), p. 77.

# *7: Pitirim Sorokin*

‘Prophets are lonely men; they have disciples, but no peers. They see what can be, perhaps ought to be, and attempt to move their brethren toward that vision. They are intemperate, challenging, and difficult. They are also necessary.’[1] Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968) was by all accounts a formidable, but competitive and polarizing, character. ‘No man who writes two autobiographies (*Leaves from a Russian Diary* (1924), revised in 1950, and *A Long Journey* (1963) can be said to be wholly self-effacing.’[2] Or as another commentator put it, more bluntly, he had ‘an ego as large as the vault of heaven’.[3] Unlike most of the other Prophets of Doom we have discussed thus far, he spent most of his career working in the academy, although as we shall see his relationship with colleagues was often dramatically acrimonious and volatile. His life was also incredibly storied.

He was born as a penniless peasant in the far north of Russia, his mother was of the Komi people and died when he was three. His father was an alcoholic and he left home at the age of ten. After winning a scholarship at a local village, he was able to acquire schooling for himself and studied at the Psycho-Neurological Institute at Saint Petersburg. Here he became increasingly involved in anti-Tsarist revolutionary political activism and was arrested several times for writing subversive literature. Most remarkably, Sorokin served in the Russian Provisional Government under Alexander Kerensky following the February 1917 revolution; he was high-ranking. When the Communists took over in November 1917, many of Sorokin’s political friends were shot and killed. Sorokin himself was arrested in January 1918 on the (false) charge of the attempted assassination of Vladimir Lenin. He was released after fifty-seven days but had to live as a fugitive in the forests. He was arrested multiple times by the Communists and suffered starvation and bitter cold. Lenin personally ordered his release after several people had lobbied for it on the basis that the Soviet Union could not afford to lose its intellectuals. Sorokin was allowed to resume his studies and passed his doctorate in 1922. However, the Communists had changed their minds and banished non-conforming scholars and Sorokin was exiled.

He left for the USA and eventually landed a post at the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota.[4] He was then invited to Harvard in 1929 to accept a new chair in Sociology. During the next decade he would produce his masterpiece, the four-volume *Social & Cultural Dynamics* (1937) (hereafter *Dynamics*), which will be the text on which we will be focusing. Sorokin retired from his chair in 1944 and established the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. He published copiously on altruism and topics such as the cultural impact of sex over the next decade. He proved to be influential on the American conservative movement in the 1950s, and later figures as diverse as former US Vice President Mike Pence and the Russian political philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, frequently featured in the media as an influence on Vladimir Putin.[5]

Sorokin was relentlessly pilloried by the academic establishment, and especially by his colleagues in sociology, for his advocacy of cyclical history. They had been hostile to Spengler, but he was an outsider. Sorokin was on the inside, and at Harvard no less, and he did the unforgivable: to challenge the progressive orthodoxy. We will return to the torrid reception of *Dynamics* shortly, but Sorokin was a fighter and did not take any of it lying down. In yet another remarkable episode of his storied life, after being left off the ballot for the Presidency of the American Sociological Association in the 1960s, he and his former students organised a write-in campaign and Sorokin pulled off what was, in effect, a coup. He thus ended his career as the President of the American Sociological Association, despite the bitter opposition of many of his colleagues. This sort of thing is more typical in academia than the general public might imagine. Nonetheless, the establishment got its revenge by virtually writing Sorokin out of the canon in the years following his death in 1968, although there has been something of a resurgence of interest in the past decade or so, especially in Russia.

Before we get to the details of *Dynamics*, it is worth stressing just how thoroughly the book was attacked by the sociological profession. Sorokin went from being one of the most highly respected sociologists in America in the mid-1930s to being almost completely ignored by 1951:

> Who reads Sorokin? Whatever the answer to the question, sociologists are generally not included in the attentive group. To be sure *Social Mobility* and *Contemporary Sociological Theories* are frequently cited by sociologists and are used by

> them in teaching and research. But the *Dynamics* and all its progeny … are lost in sociological limbo. They are no longer criticized, simply ignored.[6]

'Many reviewers of *Dynamics* seemed intent on making Sorokin an object of ridicule. Several barely covered their disdain or contempt while others let it show, almost with pride and satisfaction. One gets the impression that critics wanted to hurt, denigrate, and completely discredit him.'[7] 'Almost immediately upon its appearance Professor Sorokin's monumental treatise was greeted by that barrage of adjectives peculiar to hack reviewers and literary procurers; it was attacked by the Marxians; it was even chaffed in the New Yorker.'[8] One only sees reactions like this to a text that attacks a sacred value. In this case, the value in question was a belief in Progress. The reviewers were serving as antibodies for the American establishment for whom Progress has become manifest destiny. They dare not even entertain the prospect that it may be otherwise. Although more cynical commentators have noted that they might have had one eye on their own professional careers: Sorokin 'achieved little more among modernists than a reputation for raising disagreeable questions. The cards he held constituted no winning hand for the games most social science professionals were playing.'[9]

Let us get on to the book that caused so much vitriol. Sorokin also differs from the Prophets of Doom we have looked at thus far because he is the first who read and studied his predecessors. In 1927, Sorokin carried out a comprehensive survey of cyclical theorists going back to Hesiod, like mine from Chapter 1.[10] In it, he covered both Vico and Spengler. He was also aware of the work of Arnold Toynbee, who will we discuss in the next chapter. Some of Sorokin's sympathies are, by now, familiar to us: towards the sensibilities of the medieval world and against those of the modern. However, he differed from his predecessors in two ways. First, in his method, Sorokin employed the tools of statistical analysis. *Dynamics* is dense with statistics and the attempt to quantify social mentalities. Second, and more importantly, Sorokin self-consciously—although as we shall see counter-intuitively—styled himself as an optimist, in contrast to Spengler. In fact, *Dynamics* can be seen, in a way, as a book-length response to Spengler, part tribute, but also part corrective. It is perhaps best to advance our discussion by way of contrast. For Spengler, civilisations are a living

organism which lives, grows old, and then dies. The process is deterministic and always follows the same pattern in the same order of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and then the long Winter until death. Sorokin rejected both concepts. He prefers to talk about the 'dynamic social processes' of a culture which change over time.

> For Sorokin, human cultures consisted of millions of individuals, objects, and events tied together in an infinite number of possible relationships. But how do these elements become social systems? In *Dynamics*, he specified four means of integration. The simplest forms, spatial integration and integration by association with a common external factor were not sociologically significant. Causal functional integration, which focuses on cause–effect relationships, was important for empirical knowledge. The most important though was logico-meaningful integration. Sorokin argued that cultural systems are organized around a central value or principle that gives them order and unity. The sociologist discovers it with the logico-meaningful method.[11]

We might immediately recognise here that 'logico-meaningful' sounds suspiciously like Spengler's 'culture-soul'. While it is basically the same idea, it is also substantively different. For Spengler, a single 'culture-soul' or animating spirit determined the inherent 'nature' of a given culture. As it ages and shifts to its civilisation phase, that 'culture-soul' loses its vitality, and fades, until overwhelmed by rationalism and economism, and eventually by a new barbarianism. For Sorokin, cultures do not live, grow old, and die, but rather undergo dramatic transformations from one 'logico-meaningful' mentality to another utterly distinct one. These follow a pattern, which I will outline presently, but the model is not one of rise, fall, and collapse, but rather of an endless—and sometimes catastrophically destructive—oscillation (or as he called them 'fluctuations') back and forth between different mentalities. As Toynbee put it, an 'alternating rhythm'.[12] The closest model we have seen to this thus far is in Carlyle's oscillations between rationalistic and 'poetic' ages following the Saint-Simonian 'organic and critical periods', who Sorokin covered in his survey and references in *Dynamics*.[13]

In place of ‘organic’ or ‘poetic’, Sorokin uses the term *ideational*, in place of ‘rationalistic’ or ‘critical’, he uses *sensate*. A culture is *ideational* when ‘based upon the principle of a supersensory and superrational God as the only true reality and value’; it is *sensate* ‘when the true reality and value is sensory.’[14]

> To the Ideational mentality, reality is immaterial, everlasting Being. Its objectives are spiritual and its ways of achieving them involve man’s adjustment to the existing world rather than his manipulation of the world to bring it into line with his wishes. Faith and revelation are its roads to truth.[15]

‘There are two subclasses of the ideational mentality: aesthetic ideationalism and active ideationalism.’[16] These correspond to Spengler’s first and second estates. The ‘active’ ideational figure is embodied in the emperor, the noble, and the knight while the ‘aesthetic’ ideational is embodied in the pope, the monk, and the priest.

> The extreme Sensate mentality views reality as that which is perceivable by the sense organs, and no more. It is atheistic or agnostic. It does not concern itself with the absolute or immutable, believing that all things are in flux. Its underlying goal is the mastery of the observable world for the sake of physical gratification. Its epistemology is empirical.[17]

Again, there are subclasses within the sensate mentality, this time three:

> The active sensate which satisfies needs by changing physical and cultural worlds. The great scientists and technologists of history are examples of this mentality at work. The passive sensate mentality is a shortsighted form that meets needs by a parasitic exploitation of the physical and cultural world. The world exists simply to meet wants, therefore eat, drink and be merry. Even less disciplined is the cynical sensate which lacks strong values and follows any instrumental route to satisfaction.[18]

Hence, there is a kind of miniature life cycle within the predominantly sensate culture whereby the active sensate degenerates into the passive and eventually cynical subclasses. Once it reaches a predominantly cynical form, it can no longer sustain itself and a dramatic shift back to the ideational will take place. We can recognise in the notion of the ideational culture Vico's Ages of Gods and Heroes, Carlyle's 'poetic' age, Gobineau's 'chivalric' race, Adams's Age of Fear, and Spengler's Spring period. By the same token, the sensate culture is proximate to Vico's Age of Men, Carlyle's rationalistic age, Gobineau's 'practical' race, Adams's Age of Greed, and Spengler's Winter period.

However, Sorokin adds a third type of culture called *idealistic*, which is the *via media* or golden mean between the ideational and sensate, a 'brief golden age of harmony between the two'.[19] The idealistic—also, incidentally, Sorokin's personally favoured culture—is an 'organic combination' of the two extremes 'whose assumption is that the true reality is partly supersensory and partly sensory—that it embraces the supersensory and super rational aspect, all blended into one unity, that of the infinite manifold, God.'[20] 'It combines the best of the other two mentalities with the addition of reason as a way to knowledge. In the Idealistic view, reason is a sort of apex in an epistemological triangle with faith and sensory observation at the lower points.'[21] Idealist phases represent, for Sorokin, a transition point from ideational to sensate. For him, both the ideational and the sensate contain unmistakable aspects of the truth, and cannot quite serve on their own without suffering a dynamic and ultimately self-defeating shift, what he calls 'immanent change'. 'He insists that, first, cultures, if they are not somehow destroyed, are flowerings of fundamental principles that have lain within them from the very beginning'—this is the ideational culture in its nascent state, similar to Spengler's Spring with the essence of its 'culture-soul'. 'Second, that once a major cultural premise has been carried to an extreme or near monopolistic position, its inadequateness (what, thanks to its one-sided version of truth or reality, is omitted) increasingly becomes apparent. Then a contrasting line of development begins, which too, in time, will be undone by its own characteristic omissions and inadequacies.'[22] The idealistic phase coincides with what Vico calls the Barbarism of Reflection, so, in Ancient Greece, with Plato and Aristotle; in modern history, he posits it coincided with the scholastics between the end of the eleventh century and

the thirteenth century. The ‘active sensate’ phase started in the early modern period with figures such as Martin Luther, Francis Bacon, and René Descartes. He notes that ‘the trend has been downward’ since the ‘end of the eighteenth century’. It seems that the idealistic ‘golden mean’ can only come in what Sorokin describes as ‘upward movements of idealistic rationalism’ from a declining ideational phase. When it crystallises to become sensate—which is to say having lost any sense of the ideational — its trajectory is only ‘downwards’ until a newly emergent ideational phase brings ‘immanent change’.[23]

*Dynamics* is a very strange book in many ways because, while it is packed with statistics and the pretentions of sociology, it is at the same time somehow as polemical as someone like Carlyle. Sorokin frequently takes on the mode of both moraliser and prophet. If he does not quite thunder fire and brimstone like Carlyle, there is certainly something of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch in him. There is no substitute for being exposed to some Sorokin first-hand, let us study some key passages near the end of *Dynamics* in which he metaphorically takes all gloves off to describe sensate culture in freefall while landing blows on his progressive rivals. There is something in these passages too that gives a clue as to why so many of his colleagues turned their collective backs on him following the publication of *Dynamics*:

> Not realizing that their progress cult is already out of date, a throng of intellectuals, humanitarians, pacifistic and progressive parlor socialists, liberal ministers, professors, politicians, and a legion of intellectual Rotarians and Kiwanians of all kinds still profess this credo. They look at the historical process as at a good little boy who steadily advances from the first grade to graduation and progressively becomes bigger and better. They depict ‘the next stage’ as ä paradise where milk rivers flow between shores of ice cream, where all arms are remade into golf clubs, radio receivers, and electric toasters, and where ‘international co-operation,’ ‘mutual understanding,’ and ‘good will’ reign supreme. No war, no crime, no insanity, no bloodshed, no foolishness, no trouble; there the happy existence of the contented and highly progressive ladies and gentlemen (both being blessed with birth control). All the labor is performed by mechanical appliances.

> Everybody's dinner consists of asparagus, fried chicken, ice cream, and pie à la mode, with cocktails before and liqueurs after the meal. Everybody will have plenty of leisure for shopping, golfing, driving, bridge playing, spooning, and especially for attending conferences on sex problems or the United Nations or any of scores of other subjects. Everybody will have full opportunity to educate himself through reading every best seller and all the Book of the Month Club selections; through listening to the radio addresses of the latest 'authorities'; through glancing over the 'Literary' and 'Readers' and 'Scientific' digests; and, finally, through movies, dance halls, and television.[24]

It is striking that a passage written in 1941 still rings so true of progressives in the 2020s. We have had plenty more wars since the 1940s, crime has increased, mental health has deteriorated, and there seems to be a nearly unlimited supply of foolishness to go around with the asparagus and chicken.

But Sorokin continues, in a relentless stream of doom-laden predictions for what the future holds for a sensate culture that has lapsed into its final cynical mode. There are thirteen of these predictions in all, let us just take a few of them:

> Freedom will become a mere myth for the majority and will be turned into an unbridled licentiousness by the dominant minority. Inalienable rights will be alienated; Declarations of Rights either abolished or used only as beautiful screens for an unadulterated coercion.[25]

In the summer of 2022, a US 'Mood of the Nation' poll showed that a majority of 'Americans believe they are losing their liberties, freedom and rights and will continue to over the next decade.'[26]

> Governments will become more and more hoary, fraudulent, and tyrannical, giving bombs instead of bread; death instead of freedom; violence instead of law; destruction instead of creation. They will be increasingly shortlived, unstable and subject to overthrow.[27]

I will leave it to reader discretion as to how accurate this assessment has been of recent Western governments, but anyone who lived through it will have formed long-term memories of the White House, Congress, and the centre of Washington DC surrounded by military fences and barbed wire in January 2021 ahead of the inauguration of a President, Joe Biden, who a significant number of Americans believed was illegitimate.[28] Or how about the huge trucker protest in Canada in February 2022, which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put down with a combination of violence and financial coercion?[29] We might draw from any number of other examples from recent years, including the excessively violent Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, which authorities practically ignored in an example of 'anarcho-tyranny',[30] massive farmer protests in the Netherlands in the summer of 2022, and the humiliating sight of the United Kingdom cycling through *three* Prime Ministers in three months from August to October 2022 shortly before the worst industrial strike action seen in the nation since the 1980s.

Sorokin continues:

> The family as a sacred union of husband and wife, of parents and children will continue to disintegrate. Divorces and separations will increase until any profound difference between socially sanctioned marriages and illicit sex-relationship disappears. Children will be separated earlier and earlier from parents.[31]

Between 1972 and 2022, the number of marriages between men and women has decreased by 50 percent in the USA. Almost 50 percent of marriages in the USA end in divorce.[32] The figures in the UK are even more stark:

> For men, since 1972, the marriage rate per 1,000 of the population has fallen from 80 to 20.1 by 2018.
>
> For women, since 1972, the marriage rate per 1,000 of the population has fallen from 63.5 to 18.6 by 2018.
>
> In 2018, in England and Wales, 270,000 marriages took place. Compare that with 480,285 in 1972.[33]

When Sorokin made his predictions in the 1940s and 1950s, he was easily dismissed by a smug progressive establishment who imagined that their current circumstances would continue indefinitely. In the fullness of time, the accuracy of Sorokin's predictions are almost unsettling.

We need not demonstrate every point in this way, but it would be very easy to do so. Let us consider just a few more of his predictions before turning to his 'optimistic' prognosis for future prospects.

> The place of moral categoric imperatives will be occupied by progressively atomistic and hedonistic devices of egotistic expediency, bigotry, fraud, and compulsion. The great Christianity will be replaced by a multitude of the most atrocious concoctions of fragments of science, shreds of philosophy, stewed in the inchoate mass of magical beliefs and ignorant superstitions. Constructive technological inventions will be supplanted progressively by destructive ones. …
>
> In the increasing moral, mental, and social anarchy and decreasing creativeness of Sensate mentality, the production of the material values will decline, depressions will grow worse, and the material standard of living will go down. …
>
> For the same reasons, security of life and possessions will fade. With these, peace of mind and happiness. Suicide, mental disease, and crime will grow. Weariness will spread over larger and larger numbers of the population.[34]

It is not difficult to see, and, more importantly, to *feel* on a deep and intuitive level, the extent to which these predictions became increasingly true between 1941 and the current year. And now Sorokin delivers the hammer blow:

> With material comfort vanished, liberties gone, sufferings increasing at the cost of pleasures; Sensate security, safety, happiness turned into a myth; man's dignity and value trampled upon pitilessly; the creativeness of Sensate culture waned; the previously built magnificent Sensate house crumbling; destruction rampant everywhere; cities and kingdoms erased; human blood saturating the good earth; all Sensate values

> blown to pieces and all Sensate dreams vanished; in these conditions the Western population will not be able to help opening its eyes to the hollowness of the declining Sensate culture and being disillusioned by it.[35]

This does not appear to be very ‘optimistic’. So, what gave Sorokin hope, where Spengler said ‘optimism is cowardice’?

The key difference between Sorokin and Spengler lies in the fact that Spengler, a Nietzschean at heart, essentially embraced the Winter, and recommended a realist and ‘Faustian’ acceptance that the way to work through the *Decline* is through ‘man and technics’, while Sorokin, basically Christian in orientation, a ‘moral conservative’, leaned into and looked forward to the Spring and the ‘second religiousness’. Or to use his own terminology, he embraced as a positive prospect the ‘immanent change’ that the new ideational phase will bring. It seems to me that this is really a matter of emphasis. Spengler did not see the end of Winter coming for some hundreds of years hence, while Sorokin believed the end of the sensate phase might come even within his own lifetime. Since we can never know the future with any precision, but only in terms of its general shape and trajectory, it is impossible to say who was right, whether the change of seasons will come sooner or later.

Although Sorokin claimed that his pattern of history was not cyclical but represented ‘fluctuations’, plainly there is a discernible pattern beyond Saint-Simonian oscillations:

1. Ideational phase.
2. Transitional idealistic phase.
3. Active sensate phase.
4. Passive sensate phase.
5. Cynical sensate phase.
6. Return to ideational phase.

It is worth noting that, although he seems alone among our Prophets of Doom in venerating the period of Greek history represented by Plato and Aristotle, Sorokin’s location of the idealistic ‘golden age’ in the twelfth and

thirteenth centuries corresponds almost exactly with Vico's celebration of this era as an Age of Heroes, Carlyle's as a past to emulate (in *Past and Present*), Gobineau's as the era that embodied his 'chivalric man', Adams's as the prime example of the Age of Fear, and Spengler's as the prime example of 'high' Spring. Parsed in this way, Sorokin's ideational phase is substantially the same as Vico's Age of Gods. Carlyle, Gobineau, Adams, and Spengler do not give this phase, which represents the emergence of a people from the state of being 'barbarians', in other words *early* Spring, a special name. Spengler does, however, differentiate between the 'birth' of a new 'God-feeling' (Vico's Age of Gods, Sorokin's ideational phase) and its 'zenith' (Vico's Age of Heroes, Sorokin's idealistic phase). Furthermore, Spengler's Summer corresponds exactly with Sorokin's active sensate phase, his Autumn with the passive sensate phase, and his Winter with the cynical sensate phase we are currently living through. While I am not suggesting that Sorokin is a mere rewrite of Spengler with a different terminology and apparatus appended to it, it does seem to me that the systems are not so drastically different as Sorokin claimed in his work.

1 Barry V. Johnston, 'Pitirim Sorokin and the American Sociological Association: The Politics of a Professional Society', *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 23 (April 1987), pp. 103–104.

2 Wilbert E. Moore, 'Pitirim A. Sorokin 1889–1968', *The American Sociologist*, 3:2 (May 1968), p. 158.

3 Robert Bierstedt, *American Sociological Theory: A Critical History* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1981), p. 305.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 299–304.

5 See Dmitry Uzlaner and Kristina Stoeckl, 'The Legacy of Pitirim Sorokin in the Transnational Alliance of Moral Conservatives', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 18:2 (2017), pp. 133–153.

6 William L. Klob quoted in Barry V. Johnston, 'Pitirim A. Sorokin and Sociological Theory for the Twenty-First Century', *Michigan Sociological Review*, 12 (Fall 1998), p. 1.

7 Johnston, 'Pitirim Sorokin and the American Sociological Association', p. 107.

8 Joseph J. Spengler, 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics', *Southern Economic Journal*, 4:4 (April 1938), p. 475.

9 Palmer C. Talbutt, 'Sorokin's Challenge to Modernity', in *Sorokin & Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*, ed. Joseph P. Ford, Michel P. Richard and Palmer C. Talbutt (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 66.

10 Pitirim A. Sorokin, 'A Survey of the Cyclical Conceptions of Social and Historical Process', *Social Forces*, 6:1 (September 1927), pp. 28–40.

11 Johnston, 'Pitirim A. Sorokin and Sociological Theory for the Twenty-First Century', p. 5.

12 Arnold J. Toynbee, 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age', *The Journal of Modern History*, 14:3 (September 1942), pp. 370–372.

13 Pitirim Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics: A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law, and Social Relationships* (1937; New York and London: Routledge, 2017), p. 572.

14 Henry J. Bittermann, 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age', *The Philosophical Review*, 51:6 (November 1942), p. 615.

15 Richard L. Simpson, 'Pitirim Sorokin and His Sociology', *Social Forces*, 32:2 (December 1953), pp. 122–123.

16 Johnston, 'Pitirim Sorokin and the American Sociological Association', p. 6.

17 Simpson, 'Pitirim Sorokin and His Sociology', pp. 122–123.

18 Johnston, 'Pitirim Sorokin and the American Sociological Association', pp. 6–7.

19 Toynbee, 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age', p. 370.

20 Bittermann, 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*', p. 615.

21 Simpson, 'Pitirim Sorokin and His Sociology', p. 123.

22 Robert G. Perrin, 'Sorokin's Concept of Immanent Change', in *Sorokin & Civilization*, p. 109.

23 Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, p. 247.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 625–626.

25 *Ibid*., p. 700.

26 Emily Schmidt, Craig Helmstetter and Benjamin Clary, 'Most Americans Think Liberty has Waned, Rights Will Further Diminish', *APM Research Labs* (30 June 2022): https://www.apmresearchlab.org/motn/what-americans-think-about-liberty-rights-freedom-may-2022.

27 Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, p. 700.

28 Michelle Stoddart, 'Nation's Capital being Turned into "Fortress Washington" Ahead of Inauguration', *ABC News* (14 January 2021): https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=75259761.

29 Eamonn Barrett, 'Pepper Spray, Tow Trucks, and Bitcoin Seizures: How Canada Finally Ended the Weeks-Long Freedom Convoy Protests in Ottawa', *Fortune* (21 February 2022): https://fortune.com/2022/02/21/canada-ottawa-freedom-convoy-protest-ends-truckers-arrest-covid-vaccine-mandate/.

30 Samuel T. Francis, 'Anarcho-Tyranny—Where Multiculturalism Leads', *VDare* (12 December 2004): https://vdare.com/articles/anarcho-tyranny-where-multiculturalism-leads.

31 Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, p. 700.

32 Robert Gallon, 'Latest Figures Show Continued Decline in Marriage Rates', *Prince Family Law* (17 August 2022): https://www.princefamilylaw.co.uk/news/latest-figures-show-continued-decline-in-marriage-rates/.

33 James Mildred, 'The Startling Decline of Marriage: How Worried Should We Be?', *CARE* (2018): https://care.org.uk/cause/marriage-and-family/the-startling-decline-of-marriage-how-worried-should-we-be.

34 Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, pp. 700–701.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 701.

# *8: Arnold Toynbee*

'The *Study of History* is no history. The Student of History, as Toynbee calls himself, may know more of history than I shall ever do, but he is no historian. He is a prophet.'[1] Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) led a long life during which 'he worked for the British government in some capacity during both world wars, and served as a member of the British delegations to peace conferences in Paris in 1919 and again in 1946.'[2] Where Spengler had been a lifelong outsider, 'Toynbee, by contrast, was an insider who had grown up at the centre of the English "establishment". He came from a solid professional middle-class family: his father was interested in social work and his uncle was a pioneer of the adult education movement and was the founder of Toynbee Hall; his mother was one of the early woman graduates of Cambridge and the author of a history book for children; Toynbee was devoted to her.'[3] He acted for many years as the Director of Research at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and contributed to the *Survey of International Affairs*:[4] 'Toynbee contributed 19 essays to the journal—which must surely be the most of any individual author.'[5]

One thing Toynbee did have in common with Spengler is that he too met Adolf Hitler, in 1936, who persuaded him that Germany had peaceful intentions towards Britain.[6] From 1933 until 1954, he worked on *A Study of History* (hereafter the *Study*), a massive ten-volume *magnum opus* that spans over 3 million words and 7,000 pages. An eleventh volume, which is a book of maps and charts, and twelfth volume entitled *Reconsiderations*, in which Toynbee addresses his critics, were added in 1959 and 1961 respectively. In 1947, D.C. Somervell, with the blessing of Toynbee, skilfully abridged the first six volumes into a single book; with seven to ten following in 1957, the two-volume abridged edition still runs to over 1,000 pages, but it is nonetheless more manageable, and I have relied on it in the present study. A single-volume version of the abridged edition followed in 1960.

The *Study* won Toynbee worldwide fame. It sold in huge numbers, over 300,000 copies, with even the full 12-volume set selling more than 7,000

copies. Rare for an academic historian, Toynbee was a media sensation. By 1951, it was possible to remark that ‘the significant thing about Toynbee is that he is the most fashionable historian of our day.’[7] By 1955, he was seen as ‘fit to be mentioned in the same breath as Carlyle’.[8] By 1956, there had ‘been innumerable discussions of Toynbee’s work in the press, in periodicals, over radio and television, not to mention countless lectures and seminars’.[9] This fame also drew Toynbee fierce, even bitter, critics, as we shall see—and, as with so many of the other Prophets of Doom, he was much more popular with the public than he was with his colleagues.

Although Toynbee first conceived of the *Study* before he had read Spengler, when he did read *Decline* in 1920, he felt spurred on rather than deterred. Toynbee was also aware of Sorokin and the two corresponded, collaborated, and reviewed each other’s work. However, Toynbee sought to differentiate his work from Spengler’s in several important ways. First, where Spengler’s influences came from German idealism, Toynbee’s came from British empiricism. And he set out to ‘test’ his ideas ‘against the facts’ rather than simply asserting them as Spengler did. His ‘empirical’ method chiefly relied on consulting specialist studies of the various times and places he was discussing—as one might expect for a book that spanned over 5,000 years and 21 civilisations—rather than collecting primary evidence himself.[10] This also means Toynbee focuses more on historical events than the cultural matter such as art history or architecture with which Spengler occupies himself for much of *Decline*. Second, where Spengler insisted on a biological metaphor for his civilisations, Toynbee vowed to dispense with the idea of a civilisation as a living organism and hence the law of inevitable decline. Third, where Spengler insisted on an absolute cultural relativism, Toynbee sought to explain moments of contact between civilisations.

As I will show shortly, it is fair to say that, whatever Toynbee’s intentions, he was perhaps unsuccessful in fully distinguishing himself from Spengler in at least the first two of these three areas. This is to say that he often *does* work from idea to fact, as his many critics point out; that he frequently draws on biological metaphors; and that there is a distinctly deterministic pattern and sense of inevitability to his cycle. It is not for want of Toynbee’s efforts, but rather that it is nonetheless the overall effect of his work that ‘empirical’ method simply bears out Spengler. Toynbee often

reads as a more careful, more polite, more Anglican version of Spengler—or, if you prefer, Spengler served with tea and a vicar.

This is not to undersell Toynbee's innovations. He does partly distinguish himself from Spengler in his treatment of the contacts between civilisations. He develops a series of concepts that account for the contacts between civilisations in both time and space. First, civilisations come about—which is to say develop from *primitive societies* into *civilisations*—through *challenge and response*, a concept 'probably derived from J.C. Smuts' *Holism and Evolution*'.[11] For example, Egypt can be said to have developed from successfully responding to the challenge of how to live in an area surrounded by harsh desert. For Toynbee, this explains why not all cultures attain the status of civilisations. They can be *arrested*, *aborted*, or *fossilised* when they face a challenge to which they cannot find a successful response. Second, many civilisations do not come simply from responding to a *physical* challenge from the natural world, but a *social* challenge from some prior civilisation. Any new civilisation which is born from meeting the challenge of a prior civilisation is said to be *affiliated* to that civilisation; the older civilisation is said to have *apparented* the new one. Thus, the Hellenistic civilisation (Toynbee's name for Classical or what Spengler calls Apollonian civilisation) *apparented* the Western (Faustian) civilisation.[12] In his later revisions, he also identifies 'satellite' civilisations which branch off from a main civilisation. For example, the Japanese and Korean civilisations as distinct from Chinese civilisation.[13]

The *responses* to *challenges* come from an elite *creative minority*, which enjoys a moral and social unity with the majority through *mimesis* so long as they remain creative and successfully respond to challenges. He defines *mimesis* as '"a short-cut" … a route by which the rank and file can follow the leaders.'[14] However, over time, as creativity fades, *mimesis* becomes defective or contaminated, and the elite minority degenerates into a merely *dominant minority*.[15] In response, the now creatively bankrupt dominant minority develop a *universal state* which stifles political creativity, ruling by coercion and force alone. This is the sign that a civilisation has started to disintegrate. There arises an *internal proletariat*, which becomes increasingly disgruntled with the dominant minority, and an *external proletariat*—what earlier writers might have called 'barbarians'—who come to use and abuse the universal state to challenge the dominant minority.[16] From the crumbling edifice of the universal state, and from the

internal proletariat, arises a new *universal church*, that is a new global religion: 'So out of Babylon came the Jewish religion, as distinct from the cult of Israel. Out of the declining Hellenic world came Christianity. Buddhism in its various forms, Hinduism, and Islam are similarly related to other cultures.'[17] The barbarians eventually destroy the civilization, giving birth to a new *Heroic Age*, which acts as an interim period between the death of one civilisation and the birth of the next. Unlike many of the other Prophets of Doom, Toynbee does not view the barbarians as 'founding' the new civilisation. Referring to the fall of the Roman Empire, he states:

> In reality the Barbarians were not the authors of our spiritual being. They made their passage felt by being in at the death of Hellenic Society, but they cannot even claim the distinction of having delivered the death-blow. By the time when they arrived on the scene the Hellenic Society was already dying of wounds self-inflicted in the time of troubles centuries before. There were merely the vultures feeding on the carrion or the maggots crawling on the carcass. Their heroic age is the epilogue to Hellenic history, not the prelude to ours.[18]

This signals a *Time of Troubles*, which prefigures the new civilisation spurred on by the universal church that arose from the ashes of the last one.[19] But it is crucial in Toynbee's conception that it is *not* the barbarians who lay the foundation for the new civilisation, but the universal church. Here he seems to differentiate between 'mere' barbarians, he points to the Vandal sack of Rome in 455 AD under Gaiseric—notable for its savagery—and Clovis I (466 AD–511 AD), the first King of the Franks, who sparked the conquests that would expand the Frankish empire greatly over the next 350 years. For Toynbee, this 'spark' was enabled by Clovis's conversion to Christianity in 496 AD, 'a choice which powerfully assisted [the Franks] to survive the interregnum and to build a state which became a powerful foundation-stone of the new civilization.'[20]

Thus, the Hellenic civilisation apparented the Western civilisation via the universal church of Christianity, the Syriac civilisation apparented the Islamic civilisation (Toynbee's name for Spengler's 'Magian') via the universal church of Islam, the Sinic civilisation apparented the Chinese civilisation via the universal church of Buddhism, and the 'Indic' civilisation apparented the Indian civilisation via the universal church of

Hinduism. However, this only really has the effect of adding some complexity to Spengler's system. Toynbee's model is no less culturally relativistic, and his civilisations are no more 'communicable'. R.G. Collingwood was right to note that, in Toynbee:

> Each society is wholly self-contained. It is for Toynbee a very important question whether Western Christendom is a continuation of Hellenic society or a different society related to it by way of affiliation. The right answer, according to him, is the second. … Toynbee's principle is that if a civilization changes it ceases to be itself and a new civilization comes into being. … We must be able to say exactly where one society leaves off and another begins. We are not allowed to say that one shades off into the next.[21]

Thus, despite his avowed efforts at being distinct from Spengler and his vast empirical apparatus, Toynbee ends up simply recreating another version of it using different terms. I do not intend this as a criticism, but rather as a clarification since there seems often to be a gap between Toynbee's stated preferences and his actual results. He claims to test his theories 'against the facts', in contrast to Spengler, but there are clearly demarcations that are made between civilisations for the purposes of fitting his schema: for example, in what respects is the 'Indic' civilisation truly distinct from the Indian one? We might ask the same about 'Sinic' and Chinese. In contrast to Spengler, who was coming out of the German idealist tradition, Toynbee insisted he was carrying out an empirical 'value-free' analysis. 'Toynbee repeatedly disavows any intention of historical prophecy.'[22] But his system is 'hardly less rigid than Spengler's parallel with the biological process'.[23] As H. Stuart Hughes concluded, 'it is a remarkable sign of the contemporary relevance of cyclical doctrines that two historians of such different temperaments and intellectual formations should have arrived virtually simultaneously at similar conclusions.'[24] Christopher Dawson put it even more succinctly: Toynbee 'does the same thing in a different way' from Spengler.[25]

To summarise the above, Toynbee's cycle has the following seven-stage pattern:

1. Heroic Age/Time of Troubles.

2. Challenge and Response.
3. Growth.
4. Breakdown.
5. Disintegration.
6. Universal State.
7. Universal Church.

Toynbee's Heroic Age is virtually identical to the Age of Heroes in Vico and to the Age of Fear in Adams, although it is worth mentioning that he deplores its brutality and violence and denies it the status of 'founding' anything. For him, it is a purely post-collapse phenomenon which prefigures a new cycle. 'In social terms', he says, 'the Heroic Age is a folly and a crime, but in emotional terms it is a great experience, the thrilling experience of breaking through the barrier which has baffled barbarian invaders' ancestors for generations, and bursting out into an apparently boundless world that offers what seem to be infinite possibilities.'[26] His description of growth largely concerns the successive overcoming of challenges, but he also introduces the notion of *withdrawal* and *return*, which can either be an individual, an entire creative minority, or even a whole nation in the civilisation. While interesting, and it has some relevance to the theories of Peter Turchin, which I will discuss in Chapter 12, this is largely unimportant to Toynbee's overall scheme.

Toynbee's analysis of the breakdowns and disintegrations of civilisations which take up the bulk of volumes IV and V of the *Study* has many nuanced, novel, and unusual points of interest. Here he rejects four deterministic causes: first, the idea civilisations breakdown 'due to the "running down" of the "clockwork" of the Universe'; second, 'the theory that a civilisation, like a living organism, has a life-span determined by the biological laws of its nature' (his example is Spengler); third, that they are 'due to a deterioration in the quality of the individuals participating in a civilisation'; and fourth, cyclical history of the Ancient Greco-Roman kind I outlined in Chapter 1 (Toynbee specifically focuses on Plato and Virgil).[27] Instead of these deterministic causes, Toynbee focuses on his *challenge* and *response* model to pinpoint where and how exactly civilisations breakdown.

First, he surveys the evidence that it comes from a 'loss of command over the environment', and then concludes that this is not the cause for the breakdown: 'In all cases reviewed the most that an alien enemy has achieved has been to give an expiring suicide his *coup de grâce*.'[28] Ultimately, Toynbee locates the central issue as a breakdown in the relations between the elites and the masses, or in his terminology, the creative minority and the uncreative majority. In Western civilisation this is represented by the French Revolution and democracy, where Toynbee finds some perhaps unlikely common ground with both Carlyle and Gobineau. He argues that—counter-intuitive as it may seem to those who are prone to see democracy as an humanitarian force—it greatly exacerbates war and makes it both more destructive and more fanatical. In contrast to democratic states, with the absolutist monarchs of the eighteenth century: 'The royal players knew quite well the degree of licence that their subjects would allow them, and they kept their activities well within these bounds. Their armies were not recruited by conscription; they did not live off the country they occupied … nor did they wipe the works of peace out of existence like the armies of the twentieth century. They observed the rules of their military game, set themselves moderate objectives and did not impose crushing terms on their defeated opponents.'[29]

Toynbee does not accept that mass education has been the boon that democracy has promised. He points to 'the inevitable impoverishment in the results of education when the process is made available for "the masses" … the utilitarian spirit in which the fruits of education are apt to be turned' and, perhaps most prophetically of all, 'the people are in danger of falling under an intellectual tyranny engineered either by private exploitation or by public authority.'[30] He also points to the impact of these processes on the division of labour which, in contrast to the promises of classical liberalism, 'accentuate the division to a degree at which it threatens not merely to bring in diminishing social returns but to become actually anti-social in its working; and this effect is produced in the lives of the creative minority and the uncreative minority alike'.[31] This leads, according to Toynbee, to esotericism and 'lopsidedness'. In the creative minority, it manifests itself in two ways: the first is *homo economicus*, a worship of utilitarianism—and here we are on very familiar territory in the mould of Carlyle—and the second is in a withdrawal of artistic types into snobbishness, obscure high-

brow tastes, art for art's sake, and other such affected attitudes that cut them off from the plebs.

Thus, there is a growing disunity between the elites and the people, and the failure of the creative minority properly to marshal the rank-and-file leads also to a 'lopsidedness' in the uncreative majority. These developments also give rise to societal maladies such as the idolisation of what Toynbee calls the 'ephemeral self' and the 'ephemeral institution'. I'll leave the reader to think about their own favourite examples of modern narcissism—Christopher Lasch wrote a whole book on this topic[32]—but I can think of no better example of the idolisation of an ephemeral institution in recent years than by some of the hyperbolic nonsense written after 6th January 2021, and the so-called storming of the Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump in Washington DC. 'Inside the most sacred spaces of American democracy' led the *New York Times*.[33] However, Toynbee had in mind not only secular institutions of that sort, but also people who worship the institutions of particular churches in and of themselves rather than the spiritual content of the religion. By this point disintegration is well under way, what Toynbee calls the 'schism in the body social': the creative minority is merely a ruling class dominating by force and fraud, and the mass have become an internal proletariat who no longer has any real share in the society.

The sense of being in a disintegrating civilisation creates an internal malady for individuals as well as at a societal level, what Toynbee calls the 'schism in the soul'. The table (Figure 8.1) below outlines Toynbee's internal schisms:[34]

| **Disintegrating Civilisation** | **Growing Civilisation** |
|---|---|
| Abandon | Self-control |
| Truancy | Martyrdom |
| Sense of Drift | Sense of Sin |
| Vulgarity and Barbarism in Manners | Sense of Style |

| **Disintegrating Civilisation** | **Growing Civilisation** |
|---|---|
| Vulgarity and Barbarism in Art | Sense of Style |
| Common Languages | Local Distinctiveness |
| Syncretism in Religion | Distinct Religions |
| The Ruler Determines the Religion | The People Determine the Religion |
| Sense of Unity | Familiar Forms |
| Archaism | Living in the Present |
| Futurism | Living in the Present |
| Spiritual detachment | Living in the Present |

*Figure 8.1.*

The first nine of these are consequences of what Vico would call the 'Barbarism of Reflection' or what Nietzsche recognised as the experience of living in a world in which 'God is dead', the numbing experience of how to face the world of modernity as registered in both the poetry of T.S. Eliot and the philosophy of the existentialists. By 'Abandon', Toynbee means a reckless and self-seeking hedonism, and by 'Truancy', he has in mind something like the moral and spiritual treason of intellectuals and in particular their abandonment of religion for secular materialist doctrines such as liberalism. Note that when Toynbee says 'The Ruler Determines in the Religion', he has in mind exactly these secular political 'religions' such as that of the French Revolution or communism under the Soviet Union and, no doubt, we might recognise the increasingly religious edicts of 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' under various Western governments today. The dominant theme here is the loss of all that is qualitative and

distinctive to the ‘melting pot’, which is characterised by a soulless utilitarianism at once homogenising and vulgar, collapsing the sense of the genuine differences of localities and cultures in the name of a ‘sense of unity’ that levels and flattens. In other words, the standardisation of life. In the face of this, people sometimes reach for a nostalgic and Romantic past (Archaism) or an imagined utopian future (Futurism), but both are, according to Toynbee, forms of escapism and a way of not truly facing the present. He argues that the only viable strategy is a kind of spiritual detachment, what he calls ‘transfiguration’, and—naturally—he has in mind coming to Christ.

Since Toynbee wrote the *Study* over a period of twenty years, several aspects of his argument developed over time. The most significant change came between the first six volumes, which were published between 1934 and 1939 before his studies were interrupted by the war, and the last four volumes published in 1954. It is fair to say that Toynbee’s Christian faith makes its presence ever more strongly felt as the *Study* progresses, and he develops a similar moralising tendency to that of Sorokin. In *Reconsiderations*, Toynbee attributes this to the horrors of total war: ‘these four volumes were written after the atom bombs had been dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.’[35] Just as Sorokin came to look forward to the ‘second religiousness’, so too did Toynbee, but this is where he finally drops his pretense at an ‘empirical’ or ‘value-free’ analysis strongly to assert a *telos* for civilisations. In the first six volumes of the *Study*, which I largely followed in my summary above, universal churches act as ‘chrysalises’ out of which new civilisations emerge from the ashes of the old one. In the last four volumes, Toynbee explicitly revises this with his notion of ‘the higher religions’ (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam):

> Let us now open our minds to the possibility that churches might be the protagonists, and that the histories of the civilizations might have to be envisaged and interpreted in terms, not of their own destinies, but of their effect on the history of Religion. The idea may seem novel and paradoxical, but it is, after all, the method of approach to history employed in the collection of books we call the Bible.
>
> On this view, we shall have to revise our previous assumptions about the *raison d’être* of civilizations. We shall have to think of the civilizations of the second generation as

> having come into existence, not in order to perform achievements of their own, nor in order to reproduce their kind in a third generation, but in order to provide an opportunity for the fully-fledged higher religions to come to birth; and, since the genesis of these higher religions was a consequence of the breakdowns and disintegrations of the secondary civilizations, we must regard the closing chapters of their histories—chapters, which, from their standpoint, spell failure—as being their title to significance. In the same line of thought, we shall have to think of the primary civilizations as having come into existence for the same purpose. Unlike their successors, these first civilizations failed to bring fully-fledged higher religions to birth.[36]

Thus, Toynbee injects his, until then, mostly cyclical view of history with a strange form of dogmatic (Christian) linear progressivism. The fundamental ordering of the model has not changed: the disintegrating civilisation still develops a universal state that acts as an incubation unit for a universal church, but the *emphasis* is now on the fulfilment of this cycle as a kind of destiny to the 'higher purpose' of the new religion.

Whether this strengthens or weakens Toynbee's work is beyond my scope here, but the change does represent a major contradiction to his initial premises that the logical unit of analysis for history is the civilisation and its struggle to overcome challenges. His biographer, William H. McNeil, noted:

> Toynbee's transvaluation of values between the time he planned his great work and the time he completed it was so far-ranging that he might have been wiser to abandon his original outline entirely in 1946, and write a new and different book to explain his revised vision of the pattern and meaning of history. This would have involved overt repudiation of his earlier volumes of course and he was not ready to do that. He still adhered to most of what was there: the notion of separate civilizations, their pattern of growth, breakdown, disintegration, and much else.[37]

There is little else to do but acknowledge that the two parts of *The Study of History* render the book 'broken backed'. As Dawson put it, the 'fundamental modification of his earlier views … involves the transformation of his *Study of History* from a relativist phenomenology of equivalent cultures, after the fashion of Spengler, into a unitary philosophy of history comparable to that of the idealist philosophers of the nineteenth century'. The change 'means that the cyclical movements by which civilizations rise and fall are not the whole of history. They are subordinated to a higher principle of spiritual universality represented by the world religions'.[38] Philip Bagby also notes that, in volume IX, Toynbee withdraws his prediction that Western-European civilisation was nearly at its end.[39] While still warning against 'complacent middle-class optimism', and quite aware of the many ills of modern society, Toynbee envisions at least the *possibility* of a future 'in which a dispirited generation of Western men and women might catch a beckoning gleam of kindly light', thus 'fulfilling the true end of Man by glorifying God and enjoying Him once again'.[40] In this we catch a glimpse of the more proselytising tone that Toynbee adopted in the last four volumes of his masterwork.

However, that the universal state could give rise to a renewed faith was only Toynbee's hope. In his more diagnostic assessments, the West has, for Toynbee, already irretrievably broken down and is already deep into its period of disintegration. H. Stuart Hughes summarises the basic argument well:

> Basically, Toynbee describes our contemporary Western civilization in terms of disintegration. His characteristic criteria of societies in decline —geographical expansion accompanied by militarism, standardization in culture as well as in externals, 'schisms' both in the individual consciousness and in society— would seem to have long been present in our civilization. And the technical progress of which the Western world has been so proud he considers insignificant as a factor of growth: actually it may continue long after disintegration has set in. … Toynbee goes on to speculate … [that a] universal state will bring to a close our time of troubles … Toynbee defines a universal state as an imperial power that brings peace to a distracted society by embracing in its rule the entire area of that civilization; such as Rome was to the Hellenistic world. A universal state cannot

> revive a society that has broken down; it can simply arrest its disintegration. But in doing so it can preserve for a long time the society's traditional pattern. Frozen in the mould of a universal state, a declining civilization may endure for centuries.[41]

When Toynbee was writing in the 1950s, this universal state could have been the USA or the USSR, or a non-military apparatus such as the United Nations. Unfortunately for Toynbee's vision, today whether we look at the US government or the United Nations, the institutions have become subverted by those who seem devoted almost entirely to the final destruction of the West rather than its endurance and preservation. While few of his hopes look to be realised, most of Toynbee's fears seem to have come to fruition, including his view, rejected at the time for being unpatriotic, that for Europeans 'the price of colonial empire was now about to be paid.'[42] He perhaps alone foresaw the frenzied toppling of statues and whatnot that has gone on in the name of 'social justice' in the past few years.

The body of secondary literature on Toynbee is vast,[43] 'their scope is as impressive as Toynbee's work itself.'[44] Of the authors I am covering in this volume, Toynbee is only eclipsed in this regard by Thomas Carlyle, who was, after all, one of the major literary figures of the nineteenth century. However, perhaps uniquely, the bulk of the secondary literature on Toynbee is overwhelmingly negative to an extent that warrants some discussion here, despite my stated aim to avoid critical evaluations in Chapter 1. Toynbee also wrote a 750-page rejoinder to *The Study of History* in 1960 called *Reconsiderations*, officially volume XII, where he addresses his critics and rebuts literally scores of them. While we have seen some hostile reactions to Spengler and Sorokin, the sheer vitriol directed at Toynbee by professional historians is of a different magnitude. While some argued that this was 'an irrational prejudice on the part of professional historians',[45] my own suspicion is that it is because Toynbee was attacking the sacred myth of Progress. Of all the reviewers, two stand out, both in terms of being widely cited and in terms of the bitterness of their attacks: Peter Geyl and Hugh Trevor-Roper. Let us consider each in turn.

Geyl reviewed the first six volumes of the *Study* in 'Toynbee's System of Civilizations' and the final four in 'Toynbee the Prophet'. Geyl's main gripe

in the first of these reviews is, quite simply, that Toynbee is not empirical, as he claims to be, but rather selects facts to suit a narrative that he already had in mind. That this is a fair criticism, it seems to me, is not in doubt. However, Geyl overstates the case when he argues that 'when we try to apply [Toynbee's system] to the multiform world of reality we fare like little Alice at the croquet game in Wonderland. The mallet turns out to be a flamingo, which twists its long neck the moment we want to strike; the ball is a hedgehog, which unrolls itself and runs off; while for hoops there are doubled-up soldiers, who rise to the full height to get together for a chat when you are aiming in their direction.'[46] Geyl claims that neither he nor Toynbee can say for sure if we are currently experiencing disintegration—that may have been the case in the 1950s, but it is beyond question now. The extent to which Toynbee describes social maladies we can observe with our own eyes as daily lived reality cannot be overstated.

In his second review, Geyl gets more personal. He starts with the pretence of scholarly neutrality: 'What I criticize and oppose is, first of all, the pretence of an empirical investigation', but within a page laments 'the tone of indifference in which Toynbee discusses the future fate'. And now Geyl rallies for what is really animating him: 'He *will* have it that Western civilization is doomed, and indeed, why should he care? Western civilization means nothing to him.'[47] He drops all pretences at maintaining the impartial voice:

> I am speaking as a son of that Western civilization in which I believe and which I love, and I should consider it base treason to accept with acquiescence this sentence of ignominious extinction which Toynbee, wrapt in his dream of world unity, passes over with so light a heart. Here come into play feelings which Toynbee has throughout his immense work ignored, and he now gives more patent evidence than ever that he is constitutionally unable to recognize their existence.[48]

In essence, Geyl is unhappy that Toynbee is predicting a bleak outcome for the West and chastises him, essentially, for ignoring his feelings. I think there is something in this that explains the hostility to Toynbee in general: what he said is not what his critics felt inside. As I've explored elsewhere, in human affairs, intuition always comes first, and reasoning follows,[49] or to put it another way, Geyl's emotional elephant got the better of him.

This is even more evident when we come to consider Trevor-Roper, whose review of Toynbee's *Study* is frankly hysterical—both in terms of being at times laugh-out-loud funny and in terms of its author's almost comically unrestrained emotion. He starts out by saying he finds Toynbee's work to be 'untrue, illogical and dogmatic', and then wonders why it is so popular with the general public: 'Although every chapter of it has been shot to pieces by the experts, and although it is written in a style with which that of Hitler or Rosenburg is of Gibbonian lucidity, it has been hailed by the unprofessional public … as a masterpiece.'[50] Within a page he is rounding on Toynbee for not being a liberal and accusing him of emotionalism: 'his whole analysis is governed by strong emotional prejudice. In spite of his Hellenistic training, his mind is thoroughly anti-rational and illiberal.' Trevor-Roper then resorts to the *reductio ad Hitlerum* and compares Toynbee to Hitler. As the review reaches fever-pitch, Trevor-Roper cranks up the rhetoric, intended of course to ridicule and for humorous effect, 'All creation has been groaning and travailing to produce him; Winchester College has at last, in him, achieved its purpose; the ultimate bounds of human reason have, at last, by him, been pierced.' He continues, 'I do not consider it *a priori* inconceivable that Toynbee should regard himself as The Messiah.' It is as if Trevor-Roper lost all sense of himself writing this review. Six pages follow in which he imagines a post-collapse society that worships Toynbee as a god-like prophet. He adds towards the end, 'I find it not merely erroneous … but hateful. … Toynbee detests Western civilisation because it is basically liberal and rational. Detesting it, he wishes to see it destroyed, and he does not care who destroys it.'[51] There are uncharitable reviews and then there are reviews that take character assassination to the level of comparing your subject unfavourably to Hitler, imagining a dystopian future which worships your subject as a God across a six-page lampoon, and calling your work 'hateful'. My point here is not necessarily to defend Toynbee, but rather to point out that what he offended in these historians was not their sense of what is or is not accurate history, but rather their faith in Progress. It should be clear at any rate that their accusations of Toynbee's being 'anti-rational' and 'emotional' were projection.

Thus, the only true punch that lands from the many flurries of this sort launched by his critics—beyond matters of minutiae, which, as I have said, is a matter for *Notes and Queries*—is the idea that Toynbee is insufficiently

empirical. In the interests of fairness, we should consider the rebuttal to this criticism put forth in *Reconsiderations*. First, he argues that what is meant by 'empirical' is widely misunderstood. 'Empiricism' is not necessarily to work inductively from a disparate array of facts and then to draw general conclusions from those facts (this is, in fact, the Baconian method)—which is the demand often made by the critics—but rather, as in scientific method, to *start* with an hypothesis and then *test* it *against the facts*. Toynbee maintains he was stressing his 'empirical' method in contrast to Spengler's. Toynbee now goes on the attack against his critics by showing how incoherent their criticisms are when taken together:

> My citation of examples, relevant to whatever the point in question may be, is not exhaustive and therefore unrepresentative and thus misleading. Alternatively, I cite so many examples that I clutter up my argument with an indigestible mass of details. Whether the number of examples is too small or too great, I am guilty of selecting them to fit my theories. When they do not fit, I force them with Procrustean violence. I have a rigid *a priori* scheme. Even if this Procrustean treatment cannot make awkward facts conform, I ignore them.[52]

Naturally, he goes on to deny these charges where it is not self-evident. 'I plead "not guilty"', he says, 'to the charge of being schema-bound.'[53] My own sense, as I've indicated, is that Toynbee's chief issue is in his need to divide civilisations over time to fit his 'generational' schema, especially the division of India and China each into two separate civilisations akin to Classical and Western—I do not think that the facts bear this out. Ancient India and Ancient China are not akin to the Greco-Roman civilisation that preceded ours. Here Spengler's model of the civilisation as a life form with its own culture-soul simply works better with the facts of history. Spengler does not need to invent any categories: he has nine civilisations, some of them have died. In the *Study*, Toynbee expands the list to twenty-one or twenty-two, but, as Bagby shows, Toynbee does not really need at least eleven of these. In *Culture and History*, Bagby devised the idea of a 'secondary' civilisation or 'periphery', perhaps the best example being Japan, which is plainly distinct from China, but has also borrowed many of

its elements, including its style of writing, many of its art styles, and its religion (Buddhism).[54]

It seems to me that Toynbee takes on this idea wholesale in *Reconsiderations* in the concept of the 'satellite' civilisation (basically identical to Bagby's 'periphery'). Toynbee uses this to devise a new list of civilisations with many now listed as 'satellites' as opposed to 'full-blown' civilisations. He also loses the distinction between 'Indic' and 'Hindu' and between 'Sinic' and 'Chinese' finally to fix this long-standing problem.[55] His final list, then, counting only 'full-blown' civilisations, amounts to only ten and this essentially brings him into line with both Bagby and Spengler. Toynbee claims these revisions came about due to new archaeological evidence, but this is difficult to believe fully given that Spengler arrived at his virtually identical list in 1918. It strikes me as more likely that Toynbee was simply persuaded by Bagby's arguments, which are cited in the footnotes throughout.

Toynbee's *Study* presents a few greater challenges than some of the other works we have considered. For a start, the full 12 volumes, even if one were to take on the daunting task of reading a three-million-word book, are very difficult to find in a complete set and would require most people to rely either on specialist libraries or low-quality electronic versions. I have relied on the two-volume abridged version as well as *Reconsiderations* (Volume XII) in the writing of this chapter. This is more manageable, more akin to the experience of reading Spengler's *Decline* (itself no small task), but in some ways more challenging because Toynbee lacks Spengler's 'poetic' flourishes and because his system is, in many ways, more complex with more concepts to grasp along the way. However, perhaps the greatest hurdle for many to overcome will be the fact that Toynbee subtly (and at times not-so-subtly) changes his argument as outlined above which means we have, in effect, three Toynbees: the early Toynbee of volumes I to VI, the middle Toynbee of volumes VII to X, and the late Toynbee of volume XII, where he still makes some drastic changes (such as the categorisation of the civilisations, as above). With all these caveats in mind, Toynbee is still very much worth taking the time to read. He has many erudite and learned insights into the nature of human beings and culture which, it seems to me at least, speak much more profoundly and presciently to our present condition than to his contemporary audiences in the mid-1950s.

1 Pieter Geyl, 'Toynbee the Prophet: Review of Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History, Vol VII–X*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16:2 (April 1955), p. 269.

2 Robert L. Bloom, Basil L. Crapster and Harold L. Dunkelberger, 'Toynbee and the Cyclical Pattern of History', *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man* (Gettysburg College, 1958), p. 17.

3 James Joll, 'Two Prophets of the Twentieth Century: Spengler and Toynbee', *Review of International Studies*, 11 (1985), p. 93.

4 For a good account of Toynbee's work for Chatham House see Roland N. Stromberg, 'A Study of History and a World at War: Toynbee's Two Great Enterprises', in *Toynbee: Reappraisals*, ed. C.T. McIntire and Marvin Perry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 141–159.

5 Ian Hall, '"Time of Troubles": Arnold J. Toynbee's Twentieth Century', *International Affairs*, 90:1 (2014), p. 23.

6 For a comprehensive biography of Toynbee see William H. McNeill, *Arnold Toynbee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

7 Frank H. Underhill, 'Arnold Toynbee, Metahistorian', *Canadian Historical Review*, 33:3 (September 1951), p. 201.

8 H.F. Kearney, 'Arnold Toynbee; Challenge and Response', *University Review*, 1:4 (Spring 1955), p. 33.

9 M.F. Ashley Montagu, 'Editor's Foreward', in *Toynbee and History: Critical Essays and Reviews*, ed. A.F. Ashley Montagu (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1956), p. vii.

10 Jan van der Dussen, 'Toynbee and His Critics', in *Studies on Collingwood, History and Civilization* (New York and London: Springer, 2016), p. 180.

11 Cornelia Navari, 'Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975): Prophecy and Civilization', *Review of International Studies*, 26:2 (April 2000), p. 292.

12 Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, ed. D.C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 48–208.

13 Arnold Toynbee, *Reconsiderations* [*A Study of History: Volume XI*] (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 560.

14 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, p. 577.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 209–240.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 371–420.

17 Edward Rochie Hardy, 'The Historical Validity of Toynbee's Approach to Universal Churches', in *The Intent of Toynbee's History: A Cooperative Appraisal*, ed. Edward T. Gargan (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1961), p. 159.

18 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, p. 14.

19 Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes VII–X*, ed. D.C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 76–143.

20 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, pp. 409–410.

21 R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 162.

22 Kenneth W. Thompson, 'Toynbee's Approach to History Reviewed', *Ethics*, 65:4 (July 1955), p. 287.

23 Peter Geyl, 'Toynbee's System of Civilizations', in *Toynbee and History*, p. 43.

24 H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate*, rev. edn. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 138–139.

25 Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (London: Sheed and Ward, 1957), p. 392.

26 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes VII–X*, p. 139.

27 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, p. 251.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 284.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 292–293.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 303.

32 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminish Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979).

33 Michael M. Grynbaum, John Koblin and Tiffany Hsu, 'TV Networks Shift from Coverage of Electoral Tally to Storming of Capitol', *New York Times* (6 January 2021): https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/business/media/congress-trump-subvert-election-tv.html.

34 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, pp. 439–532.

35 Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, p. 5.

36 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes VII–X*, pp. 87–88.

37 McNeill, *Arnold Toynbee*, p. 227.

38 Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History*, pp. 392–393, 394.

39 Philip Bagby, *Culture and History: Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilizations* (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), p. 211n.

40 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes VII–X*, pp. 309, 349.

41 H. Stuart Hughes, *An Essay for Our Times* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), pp. 157–158.

42 Joll, 'Two Prophets of the Twentieth Century', p. 101.

43 See John C. Rule and Barbara Stevens Crosby, 'Bibliography of Works on Arnold J. Toynbee, 1946–1960', *History and Theory*, 4:2 (1965), pp. 212–233; and S. Fiona Morton, *The Bibliography of Arnold J. Toynbee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

44 van der Dussen, 'Toynbee and His Critics', p. 179.

45 Kearney, 'Arnold Toynbee; Challenge and Response', p. 33.

46 Geyl, 'Toynbee's System of Civilizations', p. 62.

47 Geyl, 'Toynbee the Prophet', pp. 261–262.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 263.

49 See Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare's Moral Compass* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 3–70.

50 Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Arnold Toynbee's Millennium', in *Men and Events: Historical Essays* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), p. 299.

51 *Ibid*., pp. 300–301, 313, 320.

52 Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, pp. 247–248.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

54 Bagby, *Culture and History*, pp. 159–182, 173.

55 Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, p. 559.

# *9: Julius Evola*

Julius Evola (1898–1974), 'The Magic Baron',[1] dressed in austere black almost like Dracula, and sporting his signature monocle, cut an eccentric figure in the intellectual milieu of mid-century Italy. By the end of his life he became, and arguably remains, 'possibly the most important intellectual figure for the Radical Right in contemporary Europe'. His thought is accurately described as 'anti-equalitarian, anti-liberal, anti-democratic and anti-popular'.[2] Assumed to be an aristocrat, he was, in fact, born to devout Catholic bourgeois parents in Rome. 'About his background little is known. No biographer has undertaken the project, and Evola carefully hid the details of his personal life, which he regarded as irrelevant to his work.'[3] 'Over his entire writing career, from 1925 until his death in 1974, he wrote at least 36 books and over 1100 articles.'[4]

He served as an artillery officer during the First World War, while still a teenager, but after his return he had 'fallen into an existential crisis and was prepared to commit suicide'.[5] He turned to Buddhism to overcome the crisis.[6] Shortly after, he came to be profoundly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, especially in his critique of Christianity and bourgeois culture. 'Before he was twenty, Evola had already embarked on his mystic journey as an initiate, seeking transcendent "liberation" and personal "power" through "magic".'[7] He worked as a poet and painter and became 'the primary representative of Italian Dadaism'.[8] 'Evola was introduced to Traditionalism in about 1927 by Arturo Reghini, an Italian mathematician and mason who was a correspondent of [René] Guénon.'[9] 'The publication in 1928 of his book *Pagan Imperialism* put a permanent strain on his relations with the Catholic church, causing uproar among Fascist members.'[10] He was accused of plagiarising his work from Reghini, although the real cause of the opprobrium was his scathing critique of the Church.[11]

However, it was the influence of Guénon that proved decisive: 'Evola remarked that encountering Guénon was like acquiring eyes and ears, enabling him to perceive what had previously been invisible and mute. He called Guénon his "master".'[12] After writing his best-known work, *Revolt*

*Against the Modern World* (1934) (hereafter the *Revolt*), which partly restored his damaged reputation, he sought to influence Mussolini's Fascist Italy—albeit without much success—in a more Traditionalist direction. After this had appeared to fail, he turned his attention to National Socialist Germany, which ostensibly seemed like more fertile ground, but in this he was also disappointed. 'He was kept on the sidelines of official party politics, as some sort of heretic or at least eccentric.'[13] His greatest inroad with Mussolini's regime was in his infiltration of the biological racial ideas of the time with a more spiritually oriented racism.[14]

After being part of a delegation that welcomed Mussolini to Hitler's headquarters in 1943, he went into hiding in Vienna where, on a stroll in January 1945, he was struck by shrapnel during a bomb raid and was crippled from the waist down for the rest of his life. Reportedly he woke up in the hospital and 'asked what happened to his monocle'.[15] He lived out the rest of his days wheelchair-bound, but still writing and publishing copiously, in an apartment in Rome. Many young right-wingers from Italy and across Europe would make the pilgrimage to learn at the feet of the magus.[16] 'His undisputed domain was that of youth groups, circles, journals, cenacles: for generation upon generation of Radical Right militants he was *the* sage and guru, extending his influence outside of Italy.'[17] Owing to such activities, in 1951, he was arrested and spent six months in jail awaiting trial for allegedly attempting to resurrect fascism in Italy. Never officially a member of the Fascist Party, he defended himself in court and was acquitted of all charges. His statement in self-defence has become somewhat legendary: 'My ideas are only those that, before the French Revolution, every well-born person considered sane and normal.'[18]

Given this history, it is perhaps unsurprising that the bulk of the secondary literature on Evola falls into three broad categories: the first is among largely liberal scholars researching fascism and the extent to which Evola either 'counts' as a fascist or inspired right-wing extremism, such publications were relatively common in the 1970s, but have somewhat mushroomed in recent years after two modern Svengalis were revealed to be influenced in some way by Evola: the former Donald Trump aide Steve Bannon, and the Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin, who is said to influence Vladimir Putin, although the extent to which this is true is disputed.[19] The second main category is the mirror image of that, which is to say, within the publications of the intellectual radical right itself, who

tend to hold Evola as an inspiration and guide.[20] The third broad category is within the context of Traditionalism, perennial philosophy, spiritualism, and esoteric topics such as hermeneutics in which Evola was a noted authority.[21] Thus Evola tends to be written about either as a political figure (whether a force for 'bad' or 'good', depending on who is writing) or as an esoteric spiritual guru. In this book, I am not writing in any of these contexts. I wish to place Evola alongside Vico, Carlyle, Spengler, and Toynbee as a Prophet of Doom and theorist of history, which is to say that our scope here concerns the extent to which he challenged the theory of Progress.

Before considering Evola's ideas about the shape of history, it is worth briefly clarifying his relationship to fascism, given how frequently it has been brought up. In my view, the definitive treatment of this topic was by James A. Gregor in a well-researched and scholarly monograph called *The Search for Neofascim*. I will quote him at length because Gregor was in no mood to pull punches and, as such, this should be the final word on the matter:

> All things considered, it is difficult to see Julius Evola as any kind of fascist at all. … Evola never was any kind of fascist. He was neither a 'cryptofascist,' a 'parafascist,' a 'superfascist,' nor a 'neofascist.' He was and always remained an occultist, a pagan 'magus'. … The fact is that because fascism is considered so reprehensible, Anglo-American academics do not feel themselves obliged to treat the subject with any professional detachment. Cavalier and irresponsible claims can and have been made. … Since Fascism is almost universally held to be an unmitigated evil, no one really expects to be held accountable for their treatment of its ideas. The results are apparent. Very few academics would tolerate similar treatment of Marxist, or Marxist-Leninist, ideas. The consequence is that, more often than not, we are treated to a caricature of Fascist thought. Few academics bother to read the primary literature. That is held to be an unconscionable waste of time, since everyone knows, intuitively, that Fascists never entertained any real ideas. It is a common judgment among many that Marx, Lenin, Mao Zedong, and Fidel Castro had real ideas, but Fascists never did. As a result, we have no idea what to expect

> of the thought of 'neofascists.' As we have suggested, some see 'neofascism' in the political thought of Reagan Republicans, tax protesters, soccer thugs, skinheads, graveyard vandals, militia members, antisocialists, anti-egalitarians, and anyone who refuses to conform to the strictures of 'political correctness.' The results have been intellectually embarrassing. The nonfascist thought of an occultist such as Evola is conceived fascist, while ideas having unmistakable fascist properties often fail to be so considered. This is nowhere more evident than in the treatment of patterns of thought that are somehow insulated from criticism. In the United States, an abundance of revolutionary political thought is just so insulated. Black protest thought is hardly ever considered in a comparative context. More often than not, it is treated as though it were *sui generis*, a unique product reflecting incomparable experience. Actually, more fascism is to be found in black protest literature than in all the works of Julius Evola —and yet, one is at a loss to find any of it, or any mention of it, in the anthologies of neofascist reflection.[22]

As Carl Schmitt said, the essence of politics is in the distinction between 'friend' and 'enemy', the word 'fascism' has simply come to stand in for *anyone* who opposes liberal or left-wing orthodoxy for any reason.[23] Evola critiqued both Italian Fascism and German National Socialism in two books,[24] and he viewed both 'as insufferably and irredeemably plebian and indeed modernist movements'.[25] As Alain de Benoist has argued, fascism was the aberration and departure from Tradition and not the other way around: 'an unfortunate mutation of [its] core values', a 'black sheep' in the history of European Traditionalist thought, to the extent that fascism was Traditionalist at all (as opposed to futurist or modernist).[26]

To understand Evola's theory of history, and all his thought, one must consult the *Revolt*. This book is the skeleton key that unlocks every other work by Evola. Some of our other authors, such as Spengler and Toynbee, wrote multivolume single works, a massive *magnum opus*. Evola's *Revolt* is a much shorter text, but all his subsequent works can be seen as further elaborations on aspects of that which he discusses. Of these, of which there are many, the two others of *central* importance to his corpus are *Men*

*Among the Ruins* (1953), which is the core of Evola's political thought, and *Ride the Tiger* (1961),[27] which is a more personal 'survival' strategy for Traditionalists to live in modernity. Two further works provide key clarifications on themes in *Revolt*: *The Mystery of the Grail* (1937), which elaborates on his defence of the sacred imperium of the Ghibellines (as opposed to the Guelphs),[28] and *Eros and the Mysteries of Love* (1958), which elaborates on the duality between the masculine solar and feminine lunar principles.[29] Despite claims sometimes made to the contrary, there is no real change in Evola's thought before and after the Second World War, his views 'did not fundamentally alter between the two regimes'.[30]

In the *Revolt*, Evola sets himself the task of uncovering what is meant by Tradition, as opposed to the 'modern world' of the title. His methodology differs radically from most historians in two fundamental ways: first, in his perrenialist or universalist conception of Tradition, and second, in his treatment of myth as 'truer' than historical fact. Let us deal with each of these in turn. His perennialism is deeply influenced by René Guénon,[31] who maintained that Tradition exists independently of any culture, as a Platonic ideal:

> Evola believed in the existence of an Absolute Being existing in stillness and power in a higher eternal spiritual realm, and that all other beings are no more than imperfect expressions of this single Absolute. In that sense, one of the major intellectual sources he relied on was neo-platonism, but he believed, as did others such as Guénon, that these ideas were part of the common heritage of humanity, and were not the prerogative of individual cultures or communities. He believed therefore that his principles are a universal and eternal philosophy, of which particular cultural expressions are no more than historically limited enactments; though the principles are eternal, the expressions in history are perennial. Hence the philosophy, in its better known, more influential and more optimistic guise, is usually referred to not as Traditionalism but as Perennialism.[32]

Whatever differences we see in the particularities of any given traditional culture are only cosmetic, local manifestations; in their basic orientations, Evola maintains, one can discern essentially the same metaphysical Absolute Truth lying beyond the material plane. 'Tradition is a timeless,

sacred and transcendent source of values that are unchanging, an expression of an absolute being that exists outside time, that ancient societies understood intuitively and by whose values they lived their everyday lives in all its aspects.'[33] This corresponds to the same notion we have already encountered in our other authors: the spirit of Vico's Ages of Gods and Heroes, Carlyle's 'poetic' age (particularly his 'Everlasting Yea'), Gobineau's 'chivalric' race, Adams's Age of Fear, Spengler's Spring period, Sorokin's 'ideational' phase, and Toynbee's universal 'higher religions'—although, as we shall see, some of Evola's emphases differ.

We will return to these shortly, but for now it is important to grasp that for Evola 'Tradition' means an orientation 'upwards', towards the metaphysical Transcendent, which leads meaningfully to the 'differentiated' hierarchical life, a world of distinction and quality, in juxtaposition to the 'profane' materialist world which can comprehend only matter and reduces life downwards in a flattening democratic utilitarianism which understands only quantity—in Guénon's useful phrase 'the reign of quantity'.[34] It should not be difficult to see that, whatever their other differences, all our authors thus far from Vico to Toynbee agreed in spirit with this diagnosis, even if they used different words to express the same idea. But Evola maintained that you could see this phenomenon in *every* traditional culture, whatever their differences, and thus advanced his analysis by making comparisons across different cultures, traditions, mythologies, and religions. Thus, it is not uncommon for a typical Evola passage to range from Ancient Egypt to Ancient Persia to Ancient Greece to Ancient Rome to Hindu teachings to Buddhist teachings to Native American myths to tales of the Norse Gods and so on. The *Revolt* contains a bewildering kaleidoscope of comparative analyses—he called this his 'traditional method'.[35] He also wrote, avowedly, only for a select elite, and therefore expects on the part of his reader esoteric knowledge that frankly everyone who reads it today, beyond perhaps a handful of experts in the world (I confess, I am not one of them!), will lack.

The second key methodological feature of the *Revolt* is Evola's 'morphology', which is his assertion that 'what matters in history are all the mythological elements it has to offer … the Rome of legends speaks clearer words than the historical Rome.' To the modern positivistic or scientistic mind, this might at first appear to be total madness. How could myths and legends that are objectively *false*, which is to say have no basis in empirical

and historical evidence, be 'truer' than the observed facts of *what happened*? Evola argues that when the methods of profane modern 'science' are applied to the world of Tradition 'the results are almost always distortions that destroy the spirit, limit and alter the subject matter, and lead into blind alleys of alibis created by the prejudices of the modern mentality as it defends and asserts itself in every domain.'[36] Evola's 'history is an investigation of myth, for it is in the world of mythology both that the universal principles of history can be identified and that the unending conflict of superior transcendent forces of good and evil can be most clearly seen.'[37] It is also a way 'to enchant readers with the magical world of human prehistory'.[38]

Thus, we understand both the methodology and the orientation of Evola: any steps towards the self-actualisation in the transcendent and a recognition by cultural institutions of the true nature of The Absolute lead towards Tradition, any steps away from that and towards profane materialism lead towards modernity. This provides the frame for his theory of history, which is utterly opposed to the theory of Progress and to Social Darwinism, which was popular in the nineteenth century following classical liberal thinkers such as Herbert Spencer.[39] In Evola, 'the "myth of progress"—is replaced by a sense of irreversible decadence. Evola's belief was that the world, after thousands of years of decay, stood at the brink of a ravine.'[40] His view is based squarely on Hesiod's four ages, with parallels to the Hindu Yuga Cycle and the four ages of the Ancient Persian Zoroastrian cycle, as outlined in Chapter 1.

History has a cyclical and downwards trajectory. In Evola's thought, this takes the shape of two interrelated concepts: 'The Doctrine of the Castes' (not to be confused with 'The Regression of the Castes', which I will come to discuss) and 'The Doctrine of the Four Ages'.[41] In the Golden Age, society was hierarchically ordered and spiritually orientated 'upwards' in a Great Chain of Being from a divine ruler who united the role of warrior and priest in his body and centred the society on transcendent faith. The Four Castes—workers, bourgeoisie, warrior, and spiritual authority—'were arranged in a hierarchy that corresponded to the hierarchy of the functions within a living organism', each part harmoniously carrying out its allotted role, with the spiritual authority above the warriors, who were, in turn, above the bourgeoisie, who were, in turn, above the workers.[42] The Golden Age was maintained by a *solar* spirituality symbolised by light as glory and

embodied in regality. This degenerates into a Silver Age in which the warrior-priest has transformed into a merely priestly class: 'the *Silver Age* corresponds to a priestly and feminine rather than regal and virile type of spirituality: I have called it *lunar* spirituality.' However, they come to be replaced by a more brutal warrior caste, who reassert masculine virtues and rule through an honour system privileging concepts such as loyalty and duty. This is the Bronze Age. However, it differs from the Golden Age insomuch as this masculine caste lacks the truly radiant transcendence of the original warrior-priest, he is 'the mere warrior' and is characterised by 'pride, violence, war'.[43] 'This Man was no longer pure spirit and he eventually rebelled against the lunar symbolism by either affirming himself or by pursuing violent conquest'; he was 'merciless'.[44] Eventually, in the 'twilight of the gods', the primordial connection to the divine is finally severed and so begins the Iron Age or *Kali Yuga*.

In what is, perhaps, shocking for practically any modern reader of the *Revolt* to understand, the entirety of the cycle outlined above takes place some time before the eighth century BC, which is to say that the entirety of modern history plays out within the *Kali Yuga*, with only the echoes of Tradition left in degenerated or bastardised forms for most of what we know of history. The Golden, Silver, and Bronze Ages play out entirely within the realm of myths and legends, themselves faintly remembered glimpses of a long-lost past.

What I have described can be difficult to grasp until one comes to realise that, for Evola, the *Kali Yuga* itself has its own internal cycle of degeneration wherein the echoes of Tradition become ever fainter and more severed from the dim glow of the Golden Age captured in myth. And this is the true meaning of the 'Regression of the Castes', wherein *within* the *Kali Yuga* each of the four castes—spiritual authority, warrior, bourgeoisie, and proletariat—is overthrown by the one directly below it. There is, therefore, a second cycle 'within' the grander *Yuga* cycle through which the last vestiges of the social order disintegrate, although this takes a long time (i.e. for all the 'profane' history that we know to the present).

There have been attempts to give precise timelines, most notably by Joscelyn Godwin in summary of the work of Gaston Georgel, a follower of Guénon. This reveals one large over-arching cycle, then a smaller cycle within the Iron Age itself, and a yet smaller 'mini-cycle' for modern times. For the over-arching cycle, The Golden Age is said to have started in

62,770 BC, the Silver Age in 36,850 BC, the Bronze Age in 7,410 BC, and the Iron Age in 4450 BC which is set to end in 2030 AD. However, *within* the Iron Age are four phases which each correspond to the Four Ages as 'reflections' or 'echoes'. The Golden Age within the *Kali Yuga* lasted from 4450 BC to 1858 BC, the Silver Age from 1858 BC to 86 AD, the Bronze Age from 214 BC to 1382, and the Iron Age from 1382 to 2030. But then this 'Iron Age within the *Kali Yuga*' has its own reflective Four Ages, it is a 'mini-cycle': its Golden Age lasts from 1310 to 1598, its Silver Age from 1598 to 1814, its Bronze Age from 1814 to 1958, and its Iron Age from 1958 to 2030.

Georgel posits still a further miniature set of Four Ages within the 'mini' Iron Age within the smaller Iron Age of the over-arching *Kali Yuga*: Golden (1958–87), Silver (1987–2009), Bronze (2009–23), Iron (2023–30).[45] This smallest cycle bears an uncanny resemblance to *The Fourth Turning* by William Strauss and Neil Howe and its generational theory of change; while, owing to its relatively narrow focus, I have chosen not to cover this book in the present volume, there is nothing in it that substantially contradicts any of the Prophets of Doom.[46] Whether or not Evola would have agreed with these precise dates is less relevant than the fact that he too seemed to have in mind some version of these 'nested' cycles within cycles, a kind of Russian doll model. This, I believe, causes some confusion. When Evola is discussing the Ghibelline Holy Roman Emperors, it can appear as if he is talking about it as the Golden Age, when in fact it is simply the *reflection* of the Golden Age within the Iron Age (of the overarching *Kali Yuga*). With the smaller cycles *within* the over-arching cycle, we can also start to see some resemblances with the cycles outlined by Vico, Adams, Spengler, Sorokin, and Toynbee, who each seem to have a similar veneration of both the Roman Imperium and the period of the Middle Ages.

Thus, there are moments of 'revival' during the long *Kali Yuga* in which orders are established that at least reach for the spirit of the Golden Age. Evola argued that, at certain points, the Roman Imperium achieved this and was 'sacral, patrician, and virile'. Another example of revival, as I have mentioned, is represented by the Ghibelline Middle Ages in which the Holy Roman Emperor for a brief period came to represent the warrior-spiritual authority and embodied a solar regality. The clash between the Ghibellines and Guelphs represented a struggle between an echo of the Golden Age solar principle (i.e. embodied in the Holy Roman Emperor) and the lunar,

feminine spirituality of the Silver Age (i.e. embodied in the Pope). Eventually both the Ghibellines and the Guelphs gave way to 'mere military leaders, lords of temporal justice … politically absolute sovereigns', as in the various wars of the later Middle Ages, echoing the Bronze Age. 'In other words, regality of blood replaced regality of the spirit.' But in time, this martial order too became corrupted as there rose a merchant or bourgeois caste who replace the older feudal social bonds with mercenary money relations which accelerates the spiral downwards.

Eventually, the lowest caste, the 'workers' or 'servants' or 'slaves' or 'proletariat', come to predominate and, in the course, demolish all that is left of tradition in a spiritually bankrupt materialist and utilitarian levelling that flattens all before it in a downward trajectory towards the eventual destruction of the social order itself. Here 'democracy and communism proceeded from widespread contempt for the past and a corresponding faith in progress; where politics focused on economics, where the global population was darkening due to northward migration from the global south, and where feminism and secularism forged a culture that celebrates sexual hedonism and chaotic disregard for boundaries of all kinds.'[47] This final phase of the *Kali Yuga* is signalled not only by something like communism, as witnessed in the USSR, but also by the predominance of economic, political, and social liberalism in the USA—these were simply two sides of the same materialist coin, which we will explore further shortly. There is no reversing this process—as a 'fire starts a fire until entire area goes up in flames', so too do the castes 'regress' until the final destruction of the order.[48] 'The *Kali Yuga* is characterized by the dissolution of the first three castes into the fourth caste of mass man, democracy, and "the spirit of the herd".'[49]

In the remaining available space, there are three peculiar aspects to Evola's historical thought that I would like briefly to tease out further. The first is his view of the priest caste as leading to the 'lunar' and 'feminine' Silver Age, of which he has a generally negative view, in contrast to his generally positive view of the warrior caste. This was his most substantial disagreement with his 'master', Guénon. As a corollary, he also had a mostly negative opinion of Christianity, which warrants some notice. The second is Evola's insistence on a universal conception of tradition, which was his chief disagreement with Spengler, whose cultural relativism he could not accept. The third is his view of the USA as being an even greater

threat to Tradition than the Soviet Union, and as the primary agent of 'subversion' or 'degeneration' that is accelerating the *Kali Yuga* ever further downwards.

Evola consistently treats the Silver Age (and its 'reflections' in the small cycles) as a feminine-lunar 'involution' or 'inversion' or 'subversion' of the principles of the masculine-solar Golden Age. This is the 'doctrine of the two natures' centred on the contrast between 'the *virile* principle of form (spirit) from the lower *feminine* domain of matter'.[50] As an aside, it strikes me that the contrast between solar-masculine and lunar-feminine energies in Evola correspond quite neatly onto Pareto's lions and foxes.[51] The Silver Age sees a 'transposition into the metaphysical of the view of women as the principle and substance of generation … The representation of the solar principle child resting on the lap of the Great Mother, suggesting that it was generated from her … often with cosmological transpositions, to an alleged primacy of the "night" principle over the "day" principle arising from her bosom, and therefore of dark or lunar deities over manifested and diurnal ones'.

The solar principle is always associated with the mythological North, while the lunar principle is associated with the South. Here men come to be dominated by women, we witness 'the usurpation of the sacred Hyperborean warrior symbol of the battle-axe by Amazonia figures and southern goddesses', 'the feminine became the fundamental symbol of sacredness, strength and life' while 'the masculine element and man in general came to be looked on as irrelevant, innerly inconsistent, ephemeral, of little value, and a source of embarrassment.' 'The dismissal of the virile element … was also found in a dramatic way in the castrations performed during Cybele's Mysteries: sometimes the priests who felt possessed by the Goddess would go so far as emasculating themselves in order to resemble her and to become transformed into the female type.' 'By transposition, if we go from the family to society at large, we arrive at structures of a collectivist and communist type … a sympathy reaching out beyond all boundaries and differences is affirmed; and a tendency to share whatever one possesses, which is considered a gift of Mother Earth, is encouraged … all men felt themselves to be free and equal; caste and class distinctions no longer applied, but could be freely overturned; and a general licentiousness and pleasure in promiscuity tended to be rather widespread.'[52] While Evola sounds like he could be describing the 2020s, he was discussing a period in

the very distant past captured only in myth as a recognisable archetype which can have echoes in any era.

For Evola, this 'feminisation' under the lunar principle took place whenever the priestly caste came to dominate, which is one reason why he supported the principle of the (masculine, solar) regality Holy Roman Emperor (Ghibellines) over the (feminine, lunar) spiritual authority of the Pope (Guelphs). In this he differed from Guénon, who had a more positive view of the priestly class. Interestingly, Evola's treatment of the topic bears some resemblances to Spengler's treatment of the clash between the first and second estates, the nobles and priests, which I discussed in Chapter 6. This also accounts for Evola's somewhat negative assessment of Christianity in general which he viewed as a disaster for the West. 'The advent of Christianity', he wrote candidly, 'marked the beginning of an unprecedented decline' and 'witnessed a return of the symbols of the Mother'. Christianity was, for Evola, a 'desperate form of Dionysism. Modeling itself after a broken human type, it appealed to the irrational part of being and instead of the paths of heroic, sapiential, and initiatory spiritual growth is posited *faith* as its fundamental instrument'.[53] He has in mind the cult of the Virgin Mary as well as the standard Nietzschean critique of Christianity's 'slave' morality. This marks another point of similarity with Spengler, as well as Gobineau (who Evola had read), which is his view that whatever 'positive' developments took place within Christianity during the Middle Ages under the Holy Roman Emperors happened *despite* Christianity and not because of it—essentially, he agreed with the thesis that Christianity was 'Germanised'. In an interview in December 1966, he clarified his stance:

> In talking about Christianity, I have often used the expression 'the religion which has come to prevail in the West.' I believe that the greatest miracle of Christianity is that it managed to affirm itself among the peoples of Europe, even bearing in mind the decadence which had come to affect many traditions of these peoples. On the other hand, one should always bear in mind those cases in which the Christianisation of the West was merely an exterior phenomenon. While Christianity has certainly altered certain European values, in other cases these values were reborn in Christianity, which was thereby rectified and modified. If this had not been the case, the 'Roman'

> features of Catholicism would be inconceivable; and equally inconceivable would be certain aspects of Medieval civilisation, such as the development of knightly orders, Thomism, elevated forms of mysticism (e.g., Meister Eckhart), the spirit of the Crusades, etc.[54]

In Evola's analysis, a little like in Toynbee's notion of the 'ephemeral institution', religions can be devoid of genuine spiritual (i.e. masculine, solar) content and merely 'exterior'. 'For Evola, this crisis was not religious, and he did not mourn the death of a God he never believed in. The crisis of modernity was one of political authority.'[55] 'The Roman Catholic Church, Evola sternly recommended, required discipline, not diplomatic wooing.'[56] 'For Evola, the difference (and sometimes superiority) of the West was a function not of Christian influence but of the predominance of the active warrior spirit.'[57]

Despite his insistence on universality, Evola seems to treat the civilisational cycles of each tradition separately, drawing on myths, in a series of chapters. However, it appears that each civilisation seems to be following a parallel cycle in which each is a local manifestation of a wider pattern of degeneration from a single unitary Hyperborean race of the long-lost Golden Age—which is to say that all traditions ultimately derive from the same source. Hence Ancient Rome 'was founded during the period of crisis that surfaced everywhere in ancient traditional civilisations'.[58] This naturally contradicts both Gobineau's thesis that 'civilisation is incommunicable' and Spengler's insistence on absolute cultural relativism. Evola himself was the official translator of *The Decline of the West* into Italian—a spectacular achievement in itself —and was perhaps as a result often called 'the Italian Spengler'. However, he resented the label and even went as far as to say in *The Path of Cinnabar* that 'I can assuredly claim that Spengler's writing influenced me in no way', specifically, and perhaps predictably, criticising his 'embrace of pluralism and historical relativism'.[59] On this score, it seems to me, Spengler is more consistent and thoroughgoing. While Spengler's relativism taken together with his theory of *pseudomorphosis* perfectly accounts for his view of history, Evola's universalism cannot ever fully reconcile itself with his view, for example, that Western man cannot ever fully embrace a *Brahmin* or priestly ruling

caste, or his ‘spiritual’ theory of race which is partly derived from Gobineau.

Finally, it is worth pausing briefly on Evola’s long-sighted view that the USA ultimately posed a greater threat to Europe than the USSR and was merely the ‘other side’ of the anti-Traditionalist and materialistic coin. While communism seemed to loom so large as a threat to Europe, many found it difficult to accept this thesis from Evola, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the revelation of the ‘true’ spiritual form of the American Empire as one that imposes everywhere ‘anti-tradition’ in the form of the Pride flag, BLM marches, feminism, transgender bathrooms, and so on, many have now come to view Evola’s analysis as prophetic. Evola described the USSR and the USA as being ‘almost like two jaws of a single pair of closing vicegrips, from the East and from the West, around ancient Europe’.[60] But he maintained that America represents ‘an exact contradiction of the ancient European tradition’.[61] To the differentiated man of Tradition:

> The antithesis between red ‘East’ and democratic ‘West’ appears irrelevant … The forms of standardisation, conformism, democratic levelling, frantic overproduction, the more or less arrogant cult of the expert (‘brain trust’), and the petty materialism of Americanism can only clear the road for the final phase, which is represented by the Communist ideal of the mass man. The distinctive trait of Americanism is that the attack on quality and personality is not accomplished by means of the brutal coercion of Marxist dictatorship and the care of the state, but takes place spontaneously, by means of a civilisation that does not recognise ideals higher than wealth, consumption, profit, and unchecked economic growth—an exaggeration and *reductio ad absurdum* of what Europe herself has chosen. … In a certain sense Americanism is for us more dangerous than Communism, because it is essentially a kind of Trojan horse. … By thoughtlessly submitting to the influence of Americanism under the flag of democracy, Europe is already predisposed to the ultimate abdication, and this could come about without the need for military catastrophe, but more or less the same point could be reached in a ‘progressive’ fashion after a final social crisis. Again, there is no stopping halfway

> down the slope. Americanism, willy-nilly, is working for its ostensible enemy: collectivism.[62]

Americans and Europeans were not ready to hear this in 1950, when Evola wrote this passage (and for which, ultimately, he was arrested and tried), but perhaps they will be in the coming years as the situation shows few, if any, signs of getting better, and as more and more people recognise the American slippery-slope for what it is: nothing less than cultural, historical, and spiritual suicide on a scale never seen before in history.

1 H.T. Hansen, 'Introduction: Julius Evola's Political Endeavors,' in Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*, trans. Jocelyn Godwin (1953; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), p. 91.

2 Franco Ferraresi, 'Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right', *European Journal of Sociology*, 28:1 (May 1987), pp. 107, 109.

3 Matthew Rose, *A World After Liberalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 41.

4 Paul Furlong, 'Riding the Tiger: Crisis and Political Strategy in the Thought of Julius Evola', *The Italianist*, 31 (2011), p. 25.

5 Hans Thomas Hakl, 'Julius Evola and the UR Group', *ARIES*, 12 (2012), p. 56.

6 Julius Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar: The Intellectual Autobiography of Julius Evola*, trans. Sergio Knipe (1963; London: Arktos, 2010), p. 157.

7 James A. Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism: The Use and Abuse of Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 84.

8 Hakl, 'Julius Evola and the UR Group', p. 58.

9 Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 98.

10 João Franco, 'Julius Evola, The Prophet of Dormant Empires', in *Protector of the Sacred Flame: Essays on the Life and Thoughts of Julius Evola*, ed. Troy Southgate (Porto: Blackfront Press, 2021), p. 10.

11 See Richard Drake, 'Julius Evola, Radical Fascism, and the Lateran Accords', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 74:3 (July 1988), pp. 403–419; Julius Evola, *Pagan Imperialism*, trans. Cologero Salvo (1928; Boca Raton, FL: Gornahoor Press, 2017).

12 Rose, *A World After Liberalism*, pp. 43–44.

13 Ferraresi, 'Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right', p. 107.

14 Chiefly in the books *The Myth of the Blood: The Genesis of Racialism*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (1937; London: Arktos, 2018) and *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* (1941; Quimper: Cariou Publishing, 2020).

15 Gianfranco de Turis, *Julius Evola: The Philosopher and Magician at War: 1943–5*, trans. Eric Dennis Antonius Galati (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2020), p. 162. This is a superbly researched

piece of archival scholarship of this two-year period of Evola's life, which had hitherto been virtually unknown.

16 A personal account of one such pilgrim can be found in Frank Gelli, *Julius Evola: The Sufi of Rome* (Rome: Amazon, 2012).

17 Ferraresi, 'Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right', p. 108.

18 Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, p. 295.

19 Recent examples include Rose, *A World After Liberalism*; Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *War for Eternity: The Return of Traditionalism and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York and London: Penguin, 2020).

20 See, for example, James J. O'Meara, *Mysticism After Modernism: Crowley, Evola, Neville, Watts, Colin Wilson, & Other Populist Gurus* (Colac: Manticore Press, 2018); Jonathan Bowden, 'Julius Evola: The World's Most Right-Wing Thinker', in *Extremists: Studies in Metapolitics*, ed. Greg Johnson (San Francisco, CA: Counter-Currents, 2017), pp. 130–157.

21 See, for example, Jay Kinney (ed.), *The Inner West: An Introduction to the Hidden Wisdom of the West* (New York: Penguin, 2004); broadly speaking, despite superficial appearances otherwise, both Sedgewick, *Against the Modern World* and Paul Furlong, *The Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011) treat Evola in this way.

22 Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism*, pp. 84, 87, 102–104.

23 For my discussion of Schmitt see, Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022), pp. 50–62. For two book-length studies on the abuses of the word 'fascism', both by Paul Gottfried, see *Fascism: The Career of a Concept* (Ithaca, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017); and *Antifascism: The Course of a Crusade* (Ithaca, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2021).

24 See Julius Evola, *Fascism Viewed from the Right*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (1974; London: Arktos, 2013); and *Notes on the Third Reich*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (1974; London: Arktos, 2013).

25 O'Meara, *Mysticism After Modernism*, p. 172.

26 Furlong, 'Riding the Tiger', p. 29.

27 Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (1961; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003).

28 Julius Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail: Initiation and Magic in the Quest for the Spirit*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1999).

29 Julius Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* (1958; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1991).

30 Furlong, 'Riding the Tiger', p. 26.

31 See René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Marco Pallis, Arthur Osborne, and Richard C. Nicholson, 4th edn. (1927; Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perrenis, 2001).

32 Furlong, 'Riding the Tiger', p. 31.

33 Furlong, *The Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, p. 41.

34 René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne, 4th edn. (1945; Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perrenis, 2001), p. 3.

35 Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (1934; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995), p. xxxv.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. xxxiv, xxxiii.

37 Furlong, *The Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, p. 39.

38 Rose, *A World After Liberalism*, p. 46.

39 For my discussion of Spencer, see Neema Parvini, *The Defenders of Liberty: Human Nature, Individualism, and Property Rights* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 158–161.

40 Elisabetta Cassina Wolff, 'Evola's Interpretation of Fascism and Moral Responsibility', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50:4–5 (2016), p. 481.

41 Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, pp. 89–100, 327–337, 177–183.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

43 Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail*, pp. 19–20.

44 Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, pp. 218–219.

45 Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2010), pp. 317–319.

46 William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997).

47 Teitelbaum, *War for Eternity*, p. 13.

48 Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, pp. 278, 287–301, 327–328, 335.

49 Thomas Sheehan, 'Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist', *Social Research*, 48:1, On Violence: Paradoxes and Antinomies (Spring 1981), p. 62.

50 Ferraresi, 'Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right', p. 111.

51 See Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022), pp. 26–37.

52 Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, pp. 211, 213, 212–213, 216.

53 *Ibid*., pp. 278, 280–281.

54 Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, p. 245.

55 Rose, *A World After Liberalism*, p. 50.

56 Drake, 'Julius Evola, Radical Fascism, and the Lateran Accords', p. 408.

57 Furlong, *The Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, p. 42.

58 Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, p. 363.

59 Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, pp. 206, 203.

60 Julius Evola, 'Feminism and the Twilight of Civilisation', in *The Metaphysics of Power*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (London: Arktos, 2021), p. 97.

61 Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, p. 350.

62 Julius Evola, ‘Orientations: Eleven Points’, in *A Traditionalist Confronts Fascism*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (London: Arktos, 2015), pp. 10–11.

# *10: John Bagot Glubb*

Sir John Bagot Glubb (1897–1986), better known as Glubb Pasha, led the Arab Legion in Transjordan from 1939 to 1956. Before that he served as in the Royal Engineers in the First World War, during which he was injured three times and for which he was awarded a Military Cross. One of the injuries he suffered was a shattered jaw, which later, during his time among the Arabs, earned him the nickname 'the one with the little jaw'. In 1920, he transferred to Iraq and in 1930 joined the Arab Legion. He became its commander in 1939. When Glubb took over, it was reputedly a ragtag of irregular troops. By the time of his dismissal by King Hussein in 1956, he had transformed them into a professional fighting force said to be the best-trained Arab army in the Middle East. As commander of the Arab Legion, he took part in the Second World War, chiefly in the 1941 Allied invasion of Iraq. He also led the Arab Legion in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War on the pro-Palestinian side.

By all accounts, Glubb had developed a deep affection for and loyalty to the Arabs to the extent that he took up their causes even after his time in the Middle East—for this he has, perhaps predictably, been criticised by various pro-Zionist writers.[1] In 1951, Abdullah I of Jordan was assassinated, which led to a succession crisis. His oldest son, Talal, suffered from schizophrenia. His younger brother, Hussein, effectively ruled in his stead from the age of 16. During this time, Glubb personally became very powerful as a steadying hand in the Kingdom and was said by many to be even more powerful than the king. In 1956, King Hussein wanted to rid his army of British elements, and Glubb was dismissed following a minor dispute; it is said that the age disparity between the two men contributed to the dismissal: 'the King barely twenty, Glubb nearly sixty. And it must be remembered that Glubb was a very old-fashioned sixty, paternal in his outlook where the King was concerned … his manner was very much that of the older and more experienced man dealing with his junior.'[2] Despite this, Glubb was still very fondly remembered in Jordan and the Middle East more widely, both in general and specifically by King Hussein himself. After retiring, Glubb became an historian and writer, and authored

seventeen books, chiefly devoted to Arab history, and this is where our interest lies, particularly in his 1978 article, later turned into a pamphlet, *The Fate of Empires* (1978) (hereafter *Fate*).

Almost all the scholarship on Glubb, for obvious reasons, treats him as an historical figure, focusing on his military and political exploits, and particularly his role in the 1941 invasion of Iraq,[3] and the 1948 Arab–Israeli War,[4] as well as his role in training and leading the Arab Legion more generally.[5] We are concerned with Glubb the scholar and theorist of history, of which there has been very little written. Glubb was the subject of two full-length biographies but neither have much to say of Glubb the scholar, and nothing of *Fate*; both conclude his life story after his return from Jordan in 1956.[6] This is partly because he was, to the core, a military man, and professional historians therefore viewed him as an amateur. He wrote some beautiful prose, but his scholarly citations are often scant and lack specific page references; he tended to rely on his personal knowledge of Arab history and his intuitive feel for military strategy and 'balance of power' geopolitics. Therefore, unlike the other chapters of this book, where I have been able to draw from deep wells of secondary research, here we must approach Glubb practically unguided. Furthermore, unlike many of the other works we have studied thus far, *Fate* is a very short work—just 29 pages—with a follow-up article in which Glubb responded to questions titled *The Search for Survival* providing another 23 pages of supplementary material. These had originally been published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1978 and were subsequently combined and made available in booklet form by Blackwood Press. His wife, Rosemary, made a new edition available in 2002.[7]

Glubb's previous works can be grouped in three categories: the first, of no relevance to our study, is autobiography and various personal accounts of his exploits as a soldier and general; the second, again of no real relevance for us, are his views on various political matters, especially the Middle East crisis of the mid-twentieth century; the third is a series of books on Arab history, in which we can see the thesis of *Fate* developing in embryo. The core of Glubb's historical works is a trilogy of books retelling the story of the Arab Empires from 600 to 1150 which were published back-to-back: *The Great Arab Conquests* (1963), *The Empire of the Arabs* (1963), and *The Course of Empire* (1965). These are accessible books intended for a general audience rather than for scholars. The third of these,

*The Course of Empire*, is most relevant to the thesis in *Fate*. His subsequent histories range forwards and backwards to provide a complete history of the Arab peoples—including histories on Muhammad, the Abbasids, the Muslim Empires of the Renaissance, and the Mamluks—which he believed was sorely lacking in accessible form in the English language. Glubb also produced much of this in condensed form in *A Short History of the Arab Peoples* (1969), the writing of which which seems to have been instrumental to his thinking in *Fate*.

Of our other authors, it appears Glubb was only aware of Arnold Toynbee, whose influence we can see in places, especially in the idea of the initial 'outburst' and his generally comparative approach to history.[8] There are two ideas Glubb develops in his work on Arab history, which form the basis of his thesis in *Fate*. The first is his view that history should not be focused on a single nation or parochial, but a history of humanity itself on the basis that lessons might be learned from this.[9] The second is his central idea that empires have a lifespan of around 250 years and follow a particular pattern with stunning regularity. The thought first seems to strike him in *The Course of Empire*:

> The rise and fall of empires is a commonplace of history. Yet I, at least, was completely unprepared to discover how close was the resemblance of the Arab and British empires to one another in their decline. It may be worth our while to pause for a moment to summarize these similarities. Both empires, and several others also, lasted for some two hundred and thirty years in their prime. In both cases, the complete disintegration of the empire followed within fifty years of its highest pinnacle of glory. The seeds of disintegration were sown by 'liberal' sentiment in the mother-country, leading to a policy of decentralization and the grant of dominion status to the larger dependencies. This first step in disintegration was taken, in both cases, when the empire still appeared to be overwhelmingly strong. It was adopted owing to a change in opinion and not as a result of armed revolt. In Both cases the suggestion was put forward that the throne would be a sufficient link to hold the empire together even if the dominions had their own independent governments. Such were Ifriqiya and Khurasan in the age of Mamoon, Canada, Australia

> and New Zealand in that of Edward VII. The appearance of these 'liberal' tendencies in the homeland coincided with a decline of military spirit and a rise of commercialism.[10]

The idea then seems to cement itself in *A Short History of the Arab Peoples*:

> A surprising number of empires have endured for some two hundred to two hundred and fifty years. The Assyrians lasted from 860BC to 626BC, two hundred and thirty years. The Persians from 538BC to 330BC, or two hundred and eight years. The Greeks, Alexander and his successors, from 330BC to about 100BC, two hundred and thirty years. The Arabs from 634AD to 861AD, or two hundred and twenty-seven years. The Spaniards from 1556 to 1800, two hundred and forty-four years. The Ottomans were a great and virile empire from the accession of Murad I in 1359 to the death of Sulaiman the Magnificent in 1566, two hundred and seven years. The British Empire may be said to have endured from 1700 to 1930, two hundred and thirty years.[11]

*Fate* is a fleshing out of this basic idea.

Before continuing, it is worth pausing to consider that Glubb's basic unit of analysis is the nation that becomes an empire, which is a smaller unit that the civilisation-wide analyses we have seen from most of the other Prophets of Doom. This does not mean that Glubb's analysis is incompatible with the wider cycles described in Vico, Carlyle, Gobineau, Adams, Spengler, Sorokin, Toynbee, and Evola, but rather that he is focusing on a single phenomenon which seems to be a key driver in history. Since his view derives largely from his history of the Arabs, one can see in Glubb the recognition of separate empires *within* the continuity of an overarching civilization—that which Spengler calls 'Magian' and Toynbee calls 'Islamic'. We see a shape of this in his *Short History of the Arab Peoples*. It has a definite beginning with Muhammad and the early conquests, followed by the great Arab Empire of the Umayyads (and then the Abbasids), the Mamluks, and the Ottomans. Glubb plainly views these successive empires in a continuity within a single civilisation but focuses on the life cycle of each one. Inherent in his treatment of empire is his view that, in a sense,

each race of people will have ‘a turn’ where they come to prominence and lead the rest of the world. For Glubb, a serious consideration of this fact in history should be humbling:

> These considerations should broaden our views and replace our arrogance by humility. How wrong we are to sneer at the Persians, the Greeks, the Italians or the Arabs, who, one after the other, built up the structure of civilization which we inherited. Soon we ourselves will have joined them in retirement and will have become an object of contempt to our younger successors. A further comparison with human fife may be seen in the fact that, as far as our historical records go, no nation has ever been young twice. All those peoples which, throughout history, have for a time been the leaders of mankind, are now in comparative weakness. We should regard them with gratitude and veneration, as we do the great men of the past, who once formed the glory of our respective countries.[12]

He repeats these sentiments in *Fate* and wonders if this is part of a divine plan—he tentatively calls it ‘providential turnover’: ‘Every race on earth has distinctive characteristics. Some have been distinguished in philosophy, some in administration, some in romance, poetry or religion, some in their legal system. During the pre-eminence of each culture, its distinctive characteristics are carried by it far and wide across the world.’[13] Thus, while Glubb’s racial ideas carry some aspect of the ‘spiritual essentialism’ of Gobineau, Spengler, or Evola, he eliminates any notion of a hierarchy in favour of an egalitarianism that likely derived from his devout Christianity. However, despite insisting that ‘he does not wish to convey the impression that immigrants are inferior to older stocks’, he maintains that ‘their basic human nature differs from that of the original stock. If the earlier imperial race was stubborn and slow-moving, the immigrants might come from more emotional races.’ Therefore, despite his egalitarianism and despite his deep admiration and affection for, not to mention his own personal loyalty and integration into, Arab culture and history, Glubb nonetheless in the final analysis agrees with the Gobineau-Spengler thesis that ‘civilisation is incommunicable’. Spengler’s notion of *pseudomorphosis* finds its parallel when he says, ‘Second- or third-generation foreign immigrants may appear

outwardly to be entirely assimilated, but … they will often be less willing to sacrifice their lives and their property than will be the original descendants of the founder race. … When decline sets in, it is extraordinary how the memory of ancient wars, perhaps centuries before, is suddenly revived.'[14]

Let us move now to Glubb's model. While he only cites Toynbee, his thinking is, in fact, closer to Spengler's, especially given his organic conception of the nation and empire:

> Nations can, in many respects, be compared to individuals, who begin their lives in ignorance and in innocence, without strength and without possessions. Gradually they grow in experience, in knowledge and in wealth, until, in the prime of life, they may win the loyalty and the admiration of all who know them. But all too soon they pass their peak. Physical effort becomes exhausting, mental concentration grows difficult, receptivity to new ideas is lost and the memory begins to fail. Yet we cannot say that, as a human being, a child or an old man is of less value than a young man. In most respects, however, they cannot be said to be equal. An old man is inferior to a youth at physical exertion, but superior to him in experience or in wealth.[15]

He rejects the progressive notion that massive improvements in technology have, in some sense, broken such cycles. He points out that he sees as fatuous 'those persons who claim that history has no lessons for us because former empires did not possess spacecraft, jet fighters or other such mechanical or electronic devices' because 'history teaches us lessons in human nature, which has not changed.' 'The explanation of this uniformity [of the rise and fall of empires] would appear to lie in the field of human psychology rather than of electronics. Eight or nine generations seem to be sufficient to change the hardy and enterprising pioneers into the idle and querulous citizens of the welfare state.'[16] Thus there is the echo of Polybius in Glubb's thinking also (as well as ideas explored in Strauss and Howe's *The Fourth Turning*),[17] whereby generational factors play an important role in the shape of history. Glubb argues that the lifespan of an empire—always around 250 years —represents about ten generations.

Glubb observes that every empire in history moves through the same stages in its life cycle, these are:

1. The Age of Pioneers (‘The Outburst’).
2. The Age of Conquests.
3. The Age of Commerce.
4. The Age of Affluence.
5. The Age of Intellect.
6. The Age of Decadence.[18]

Of these, we can immediately recognise ‘The Outburst’ as being analogous to Vico’s Age of Gods or Adams’s Age of Fear. In the case of the Arab Empire, it was the original followers of Muhammad, who were men so fanatical and savage that they were terrifying to fight for the trained Byzantine and Persian forces, who had vastly superior technology and resources, but who had become accustomed to luxury. They were sufficiently uncivilised or ‘barbarian’ that you believed without cleverness or irony in the teachings of the prophet almost as if imbued with magic—a fact, of course, that both Carlyle and Evola had recognised.[19] As well as the Arabs, other examples of groups who ‘burst out’ include the Macedonians, which had been ‘an insignificant state to the north of Greece’, the Mongols, who were ‘a group of savage tribes in the steppes’, and the Spanish, who had been under Arab rule ‘for 780 years’, although there are many other examples.[20]

The Age of Conquests is analogous to Vico’s Age of Heroes, ‘a period of amazing initiative, and almost incredible enterprise, courage and hardihood’ which ‘in a very short time, produce a new and formidable nation’. In Glubb’s conception, this is practically always a barbarian group attacking an older civilisation and calls to mind Toynbee’s ‘challenge and response’. ‘The conquest of great areas of land and their subjection to one government automatically acts as a stimulant to commerce. Both merchants and goods can be exchanged over considerable distances.’ This leads inevitably to the Age of Commerce. This seems to follow what Evola calls the ‘regression of the castes’ from the warrior caste to the bourgeoisie, or in Spengler’s terms a shift from the first estate to the third estate. However, the values of duty and obligation and the strength of the social bonds that develop during the martial spirit of the Age of Conquests are still in effect for at least ‘the first

half of the Age of Commerce', which Glubb says is 'particularly splendid' because 'the ancient virtues of courage, patriotism and devotion to duty are still in evidence.' He discusses, for example, how 'boys are still required, first of all, to be manly—to ride, to shoot straight and to tell the truth', and how 'boys' schools are intentionally rough. Frugal eating, hard living, breaking the ice to have a bath and similar customs are aimed at producing a strong, hardy and fearless breed of men.'[21]

However, the Age of Commerce produces genuine prosperity to the point of excess luxury, which marks a transition into the Age of Affluence. Glubb states: 'There does not appear to be any doubt that money is the agent which causes the decline of this strong, brave and self-confident people.'[22] The Age of Affluence marks the 'High Noon' of the empire, which seems to parallel Spengler's transition from late Summer into the Autumn period. In terms of specific empires, he names Augustus for the Romans, Harun Al-Rashid for the Abbasid Empire, Suleiman the Magnificent for the Ottomans, Queen Victoria for the British Empire and, tentatively, Woodrow Wilson for the Americans as coinciding with their respective 'high noons'. Glubb writes:

> Gradually, and almost imperceptibly, the Age of Affluence silences the voice of duty. The object of the young and ambitious is no longer fame, honour or service, but cash. … No longer do schools aim at producing brave patriots ready to service their country. Parents and students alike seek educational qualifications which will command the highest salaries.[23]

This strongly echoes the analysis of Carlyle writing in the 1850s and Adams writing at the turn of the century, each at the cusp of their respective 'high noons', sensing the change that Glubb describes in the zeitgeist—the universal cash nexus of man to man.

According to Glubb, there now follows an Age of Intellect—this is directly analogous to Vico's Barbarism of Reflection, Spengler's Autumn, and Sorokin's 'idealistic' phase. He argues that 'the most dangerous product of the Age of Intellect is the unconscious growth of the idea that the human brain can solve the problems of the world.'[24] This is what Thomas Sowell might call the 'unconstrained' or 'utopian' vision of man, exemplified in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and at the root of much of leftist, liberal, and

progressive thought.[25] For Glubb, a military man through and through, 'intellectualism … destroys the spirit of self-sacrifice … The brilliant but cynical intellectual appears at the opposite end of the spectrum from the emotional self-sacrifice of the hero or the martyr. Yet there are times when the perhaps unsophisticated self-dedication of the hero is more essential than the sarcasms of the clever.'[26] Glubb plainly yearns for the same sense of the poetic, the chivalric, and the heroic that practically all our authors thus far have called for, the affinities between them start to feel almost uncanny.

Intellectualism gives rise to the final period, the Age of Decadence, directly analogous to Vico's Age of Men, Carlyle's 'Latter Days', Adams's Age of Greed, Spengler's Winter, and Toynbee's stage of disintegration. This is also where Glubb's analysis comes into its own, especially as he is able to draw from his deep knowledge of the Arab empires for points of reference. The Age of Decadence marks the near total loss of the sense of duty that had marked the empire in its period of growth, as expansion turns to defensiveness and a holding onto what one already possesses. Optimism turns to pessimism. This coincides with an 'intensification of internal political hatreds'—of which no one who lived through the Brexit and Trump eras needs to be reminded. Interestingly, Glubb argues this intensification of hatred is exacerbated by a two-party parliamentary democracy.[27] Alongside these developments, the heroes of the day are no longer great statesmen, military leaders, or great literary figures, but vapid celebrities of various kinds, such as pop singers, actors, comedians, and sports stars. Glubb notes similar trends in the late Roman empire, the late Byzantine empire, and the late Arab empire. In the *Course of Empires*, Glubb had been almost dumbfounded to find accounts of an outbreak of feminism in the tenth-century Arab Empire:

> An increase in the influence of women in public life has often been associated with imperial decline. The later Romans complained that, although Rome ruled the world, women ruled Rome. In the tenth century, a similar tendency was observable in the Arab Empire, the women demanding admission to the professions hitherto monopolized by men. 'What,' writes Ibn Bessam in indignation, 'have the professions of clerk, tax-collector or preacher to do with women? These occupations have always been limited to men alone.' Many women, it

> appears, practised law, while others became professors of theology. There was even an agitation for the appointment of female judges which, however, seems to have been successfully resisted. Contemporary historians deplore the extraordinary influence acquired by popular singers over young people, resulting in a decline of sexual morality. In the second half of the tenth century, obscene sexual language, which would not have been tolerated in an earlier and stricter age, came increasingly into common use. At this moment of declining trade and financial stringency, the people of Baghdad decided to work only five days a week. Some of history's repetitions are truly breathtaking.[28]

He repeated this in *The Fate of Empires*, and Glubb started to feel—perhaps precipitated by his strengthened faith after a near-death experience following a heart complication in 1971[29]—that the pattern is so immutable that it has been ordained by divine providence:

> When I first read these contemporary descriptions of tenth-century Baghdad, I could scarcely believe my eyes. I told myself that this must be a joke! The descriptions might have been taken out of *The Times* today. The resemblance of all the details was especially breathtaking—the break-up of the empire, the abandonment of sexual morality, the 'pop' singers with their guitars, the entry of women into the professions, the five-day week. I would not venture to attempt an explanation! There are so many mysteries about human life which are far beyond our comprehension.[30]

It would be redundant for me to point out the similarities we see around us today.

Glubb also notes other major symptoms of the Age of Decadence are a decline in religion and the 'spirit of dedication', and a robust and generous welfare state. 'The impression that it will always be automatically rich causes the declining empire to spend lavishly on its own benevolence, until such time that the economy collapses, the universities are closed and the

hospitals fall into ruin.'[31] Particularly prescient for the present time are Glubb's passages on immigration, which he calls 'the influx of foreigners':

> Baghdad, in its prime in the ninth century, was international in its population—Persians, Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Egyptians, Africans and Greeks mingled in its streets. In London today, Cypriots, Greeks, Italians, Russians, Africans, Germans and Indians jostle one another on the buses and in the underground, so that it sometimes seems difficult to find any British. The same applies to New York, perhaps even more so.[32]

As we saw earlier, Glubb's Christian egalitarianism would not allow him to believe in a hierarchy of the races,[33] but he did maintain that a dilution of the original stock of an empire would diminish its ability to defend itself against external and internal threats. In Britain and in America today, and in most of Europe, any such ability for self-defence seems a rapidly fading memory. Furthermore, any response to the ever-accelerating demographic transformation of our major cities that does not loudly *celebrate* this fact is increasingly treated as a 'hate crime' —such is the Age of Decadence.

Glubb has few suggestions for what can be done about this as he sees the fate of empires and his cycle almost as an immutable and divinely ordained law of things rooted in human nature. He argues that teaching generations of people about the cycle might help to induce in them the 'spirit of dedication' that would be necessary to arrest the decline. Would it help? He turns pessimistically, 'the answer is doubtful, but we could but try. The weaknesses of human nature, however, are so obvious that we cannot be too confident of success.'[34] Elsewhere, in *A Short History of the Arab Peoples*, he worries about the power of the mass media to exacerbate the forces of subversion that enjoy free rein during the Age of Decadence:

> But if governments can 'brain-wash' their citizens by these means, in 'free' countries the same influence can be brought to bear secretly by large financial interests, who exercise a controlling influence over the press, the television and the cinema. Elected governments can become helpless puppets in the hands of such concealed, but powerful forces. The same secret groups can undermine the morals, destroy the patriotism or ridicule the religion of any nation, the moral fibre of which

> may resist their ambitions. None of these manoeuvres are really new. We have already seen that the Abbasids destroyed the Umayyads by subversive propaganda in the modern style. But, if the idea of subversion is old, the modem expansion of the press, broadcasting, the cinema and publishing have immensely increased the power of subversion and indoctrination.[35]

Here Glubb is particularly far-sighted, to look beyond the nuclear scares of the 1970s to the much more insidious forces of social decay worming their way through the culture via the media:

> We are terrified, in our moments of weakness, at the possibility of extermination in a nuclear war. Yet the prospect of the destruction of our minds and our morals by mass brain-washing media is in a way even more alarming. Yet there are reserves of spiritual strength available to men, sufficient to enable them to resist. Only by a real revival of spiritual life can these subversive machinations be defeated.[36]

Thus, Glubb concludes in a similar position to that of Toynbee and to some extent that of Carlyle, Adams, Sorokin, and Evola: yearning for a spiritual revival that might at least have a chance to withstand the hurricane of entropy that now seems upon us. He repeats this in *The Search for Survival*: 'Our country is obsessed by the grudging spirit of "Why should I?" … But if our leaders are incapable of setting us such an example, we must do it ourselves. We need the spirit of the prophet who, when he heard that hard service was needed, cried joyfully, "Here am I! Send me!".' However, one senses that Glubb was a realist and was under no illusions that such a thing could happen—but then, as an old man, in his 80s, he could say that he tried.

1 A good example is Edward W. Jelenko, 'Review of John Bagot Glubb, *A Solider with the Arabs*', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1959), pp. 205–207. For a more balanced book-length treatment, see Benny Morris, *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine and the Jews* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

2 James Lunt, 'Glubb Pasha', *Asian Affairs*, 18:2 (1987), p. 134.

3 See Tancred Bradshaw (ed.), *The Glubb Reports: Glubb Pasha and Britain's Empire Project in the Middle East 1920–1956* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

4 See Matthew Hughes, 'The Conduct of Operations: Glubb Pasha, the Arab Legion, and the First Arab–Israeli War, 1948–49', *War in History*, (2018), pp. 1–24.

5 See Graham Jevon, *Glubb Pasha and the Arab Legion: Britain, Jordan, and the End of the Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

6 See Trevor Royle, *Glubb Pasha: The Life and Times of Sir John Bagot Glubb, Commander of the Arab Legion* (London: Abacus, 1992); James Lunt, *Glubb Pasha: A Biography* (London: Harvill Press, 1984).

7 John Bagot Glubb, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival* (1978; Uckfield: Windmill Press, 2002).

8 John Bagot Glubb, *The Course of Empire: The Arabs and Their Successors* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 42, 404.

9 John Bagot Glubb, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Stein & Day, 1969), pp. 288–300; Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, p. 7.

10 Glubb, *The Course of Empire*, p. 397.

11 Glubb, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 296.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 297.

13 Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, p. 12.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

15 Glubb, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 295.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 296.

17 See William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997).

18 Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, p. 36.

19 Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, ed. Michael K. Goldberg (1841; Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 37–66; Julius Evola, *The Metaphysics of War*, ed. John B. Morgan, 3rd edn. (London: Arktos, 2011), pp. 41–47.

20 Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, pp. 10–11.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 13–17.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

25 Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, rev. edn. (1987; New York: Basic Books, 2007), p. 162.

26 Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, p. 21.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

28 Glubb, *The Course of Empire*, p. 50.

29 Royle, *Glubb Pasha*, pp. 494–495.

30 Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, p. 25.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

33 Lunt, *Glubb Pasha*, p. 234.

34 Glubb, *The Fate of Empires*, p. 35.

35 Glubb, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 299.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 300.

# *11: Joseph Tainter*

Joseph Tainter (1949–) is an archaeologist and anthropologist who has been based at the University of Utah for the past decade. He obtained his PhD in Anthropology in 1975 from Northwestern University and spent three years teaching at the University of New Mexico directly afterwards. He joined the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service as an archaeologist in 1978 and spent the next 27 years working for the USDA Forest Service in some capacity before rejoining academia in 2005. In 1988, he wrote *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (hereafter the *Collapse*) which has become the most cited and influential study of collapse of the past thirty-five years.[1] It was particularly influential on the noted geographer Jared Diamond and his popular book *Collapse* (2005).[2] It has given rise to what has been called 'collapse literature'.[3] Where the sort of histories that Spengler and Toynbee wrote is typically called 'macrohistory' or sometimes 'universal history', Tainter helped usher in what is labelled 'big history', a term coined by David Christian.[4] In what follows, I will first outline Tainter's basic theory of collapse and then turn to his critiques of Spengler, Toynbee, and most of his other predecessors, which forms a large part of the first half of *Collapse*, and cannot go unaddressed.

In contrast to the nine authors who we have covered thus far, Tainter approaches his subject using what Carlyle would call 'the dismal science' or 'the bean counter', which is to say, the economist's lens. As we shall see later, he seeks to distinguish himself from practically all his predecessors by grounding his analysis purely in measurable material factors. He seeks to isolate decisive factors in a 'scientific' manner. It is worth noting that Vico, Gobineau, Toynbee, and Sorokin all laid claim to taking a 'scientific' approach to the material, even as we have seen that their work was decidedly not scientific. Tainter argues that human societies must primarily be defined as 'problem-solving organizations', which can be small-scale and simple or large-scale and complex. Tainter reduces his analysis of 'complex societies'—a term he prefers to 'civilisation'—down to an 'equation' with 'sociopolitical organization' on one side and 'energy flow' on the other. When Tainter uses the term 'energy', he does not mean it like,

say, Brooks Adams—who used that word to mean something like 'the spirit of the people'—he is referring to *fuel* used in economic processes which can be measured units such as horsepower.[5] For Tainter, as Ugi Bardi summarises:

> Society tends to solve the problems it faces by always increasing the size of its control structures. For instance, facing a military threat, it will normally increase the size of the army, and this is what the Roman Empire did. That, in turn, implied that they needed to provide food and lodging for the soldiers, to increase the size of the command structure, to enlarge the imperial bureaucracy, and so on.[6]

As societies become more complex, the need for both sociopolitical organisation and energy increase exponentially:

> More complex societies are more costly to maintain than simpler ones, requiring greater support levels per capita. As societies increase in complexity, more networks are created among individuals, more hierarchical controls are created to regulate these networks, more information is processed, there is more centralization of information flow, there is increasing need to support specialists not directly involved in resource production, and the like. All of this complexity is dependent upon energy flow at a scale vastly greater than that characterizing small groups of self-sufficient foragers or agriculturalists. The result is that as a society evolves toward greater complexity, the support costs levied on each individual will also rise, so that the population as a whole must allocate increasing portions of its energy budget to maintaining organizational institutions. This is an immutable fact of societal evolution, and is not mitigated by type of energy source.[7]

However, 'increased sociopolitical complexity' causes 'rigidity and fragility while drawing off scarce resources' and this is 'a major cause' of collapse.[8]

To demonstrate his case, Tainter uses marginalist analysis borrowed from economics:[9]

> It is suggested that the increased costs of sociopolitical evolution frequently reach a point of diminishing marginal returns. This is to say that the benefit/investment ratio of sociopolitical complexity follows the marginal product curve … After a certain point, increased investments in complexity fail to yield proportionately increasing returns. Marginal returns decline and marginal costs rise. Complexity as a strategy becomes increasingly costly, and yields decreasing marginal benefits.[10]

In economic theory, one expects a firm to optimise its marginal productivity simply by stopping at the point that the marginal product and average product intersect. Tainter provides the figure below (Figure 11.1), which is the standard method of calculating marginal productivity.

Relationship of marginal and average product.

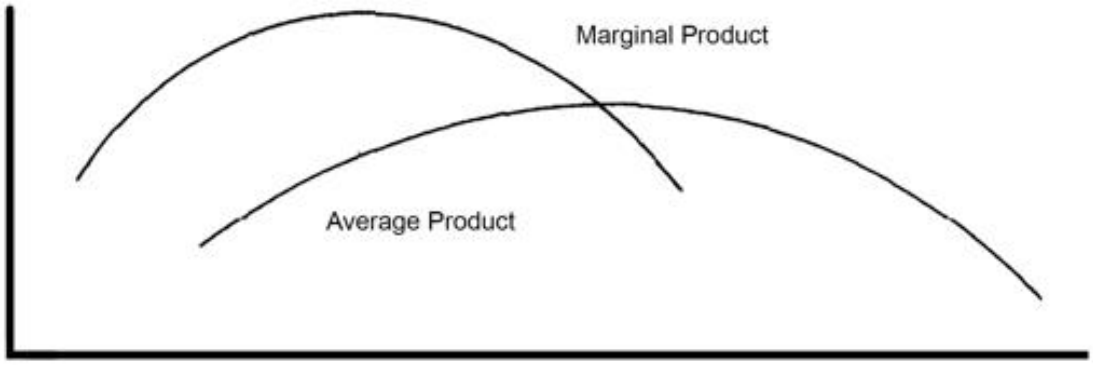



*Figure 11.1.*

For example, consider a coffee shop which has three workers who can serve 18 coffees an hour; the average unit product, which is the total output (coffees) divided by the number of input units (workers), is 6 customers per worker. Let us say adding a fourth worker takes coffee output up to 30, a fifth increases output to 40, a sixth to 45, and a seventh to 49. We can see that the average unit product with 4 workers is 7.5, with 5 workers is 8, with 6 workers is 7.5, and with 7 workers is 7. However, the marginal

product is simply a measure of how many extra coffees each additional worker provides: we can see the fourth worker adds 12 coffees, the fifth adds 10, the sixth adds 5, and the seventh adds 4. It is suboptimal for the owner of the coffee shop to hire the sixth worker since both the average product and the marginal product have peaked. In other words, the two lines intersect on our imagined graph at the fifth worker. Thus, the firm hires only five workers. The only way that the coffee shop might optimally expand beyond this is by changing some other variable, let us say number of tills or number of coffee machines, which economists would call 'fixed capital'—this would then change the calculation as the output per unit of input would increase, and finally we might get our sixth and seventh workers, and so on.

Since we *expect* firms to optimise in this way, towards maximum cost–benefit efficiency, the key question, therefore, must be why do collapsing civilisations continue to expand beyond their optimum efficiency? In other words, why could, for example, the Romans not have done the civilisational equivalent of simply stopping at the fifth worker? We might describe such a situation as 'stagnation' rather than 'collapse'. This is not made immediately clear by Tainter. Instead, he points out many examples of declining marginal returns in fields such as agriculture. To take one such example, Tainter argues that one of the key areas of complexity is in 'information processing':

> The processing of large quantities of information is an essential aspect of complex societies, and indeed the need for this processing is probably one of the reasons that such societies came into existence. Yet the costs of information processing, in many spheres, show a trend of declining marginal productivity. … As the size of a social group increases, the communication load increases even faster. Information processing increases in response until capacity is reached. After this point, information processing performance deteriorates, so that greater costs are allocated to processing that is less efficient and reliable.[11]

He then demonstrates the theory with a real-world example taken from twentieth-century USA:

> The marginal productivity of research and development (R&D) in the United States, and elsewhere, displays a disturbing trend. Fig. 9 shows clearly that as the number of scientists, engineers, and technicians in the United States rose between 1900 and 1954, their productivity, as reflected in patents issued, declined sharply. Furthermore, the number of patent applications relative to the population of the United States rose until about 1920, and then began to decline. Patent applications filed between 1941 and 1960, relative to personnel and expenditures committed to research and development, declined noticeably.[12]

This trend has been noted by, among others, Edward Dutton, who notes that the per capita rate of major innovations has been in decline since about 1850.[13] Tainter also notes declining marginal returns in education: 'with increasing time spent in education and greater specialization, the learning that occurs yields decreased general benefits for greater costs.'[14] Dutton puts it more simply: 'people [are] spending longer at schools (to compensate for slower learning)' and we are seeing 'a fall in academic standards and thus grade inflation'.[15]

The question remains, however: if marginalist analysis is pertinent to the study of complex societies, then why do those societies not conform to the expectations of economic theory? Tainter does attempt to provide some answer. He argues:

> Rulers … must constantly legitimize their reigns. Legitimizing activities include such things as external defense and internal order, alleviating the effects of local productivity fluctuations, undertaking local development projects, and providing food and entertainment (as in Imperial Rome) for urban masses. In many cases the productivity of these legitimizing investments will decline. Whatever activities a hierarchy undertakes initially to bond a population to itself (providing defense, agricultural development, public works, bread and circuses, and the like) often thereafter become *de rigueur*, so that further bonding activities are at higher cost, with little or no additional benefit to the hierarchy.[16]

If further activities bring no additional benefit to the hierarchy, then why would they invest in them at all? Tainter says:

> Consider the situation of a hierarchy that must invest in legitimizing activities among a politically potent but minimally compliant segment of the population. Once this population segment has become accustomed to any pattern of increasing investment in legitimization, continuance of this trajectory is necessary to maintain the compliance status quo. Increased investment in legitimizing activities brings little or no increased compliance, and the marginal return on investment in legitimization correspondingly declines. The appeasement of urban mobs presents the classic illustration of this principle. Any level of activities undertaken to appease such populations —the bread and circuses syndrome—eventually becomes the expected *minimum*. An increase in the cost of bread and circuses, which seems to have been required in Imperial Rome to legitimize such things as the accession of a new ruler or his continued reign, may bring no increased return beyond a state of non-revolt.[17]

In purely economic terms, to return to the analogy of our coffee shop, we might say that the complex society is facing an inflationary environment in which its fixed costs, let us say ground rent, maintenance of coffee machines, and so on, keep increasing. The passage above from Tainter makes this new variable clear. What accounts for this inflationary environment? This is where the other side of Tainter's equation comes in: the hard limit of *energy*, or rather sources of energy, required to fuel complex societies—so long as they remain scarce, the society faces an inflationary environment. In basic economic terms, there is a fixed supply of fuel and an ever-increasing demand for it driven by the need for bureaucratic expansion. To return to our coffee shop, in addition to this inflationary environment, customers have also become used to paying only $3 for their coffee and a certain level of price rigidity has set in: even if costs can be offset by raising this price, customers will simply stop buying coffee at, say, $3.15, which is not enough to continue making a return and would result in the coffee shops elimination from the market. Against such a backdrop, just to stay afloat, the coffee shop would be forced to start

taking suboptimal decisions. Let us say hiring that sixth worker to eke out another 5 coffees per hour, suboptimal in terms of marginal productivity, but perhaps the extra $126 per day might keep the coffee shop in business. This is the sort of desperate situation faced by what economists call 'supra-marginal firms' in the real world all the time. In Tainter's view, a similar situation is faced by the rulers of complex societies beyond a certain point of complexity—we might say they become supra-marginal societies. Here such a society reaches a point where 'at increased cost it is able to do little more than maintain the status quo.'[18] The rest of *Collapse* is devoted to demonstrating this with case studies, specifically the Romans, the Mayans, and the Chacoans.

When the marginal returns reach a point at which the status quo can no longer be maintained, we witness the societal equivalent of a firm declaring bankruptcy and being eliminated from the market. In practice, this entails the breaking up of large bureaucratic empires into smaller, simpler sociopolitical units such as, for example, early feudalism.

> Collapse is fundamentally a sudden, pronounced loss of an established level of sociopolitical complexity. A complex society that has collapsed is suddenly smaller, simpler, less stratified, and less socially differentiated. Specialization decreases and there is less centralized control. The flow of information drops, people trade and interact less, and there is overall lower coordination among individuals and groups. Economic activity drops to a commensurate level, while the arts and literature experience such a quantitative decline that a dark age often ensues. Population levels tend to drop, and for those who are left the known world shrinks.[19]

For Tainter, this has nothing to do with such intangible factors as 'the spirit of the people' such as those outlined by our nine previous authors but is purely a function of the marginalist analysis outlined above, in particular the cost of expanding bureaucracy merely to maintain the status quo. Tainter suggests that the situation for the West as it stands today looks bleak unless an alternative to reliance on fossil fuels can be found: 'A new energy subsidy is necessary if a declining standard of living and a future global collapse are to be averted.'[20] A practically inexhaustible new supply of energy would reduce costs sufficiently for the expansion of societal

controlling mechanisms to regain optimal marginal productivity. Or, in other words, the inflationary environment faced by our societal coffee shop would suddenly be deflationary—that is, the key variable that puts the enterprise in such danger has now been changed.

Over thirty-five years on, as the West faces an unprecedented energy crisis, the winter of 2022 brought with it record energy prices across Europe,[21] the *deus ex machina* for which Tainter hoped does not seem to be arriving any time soon. Although sceptics of the climate change lobby would be quick to point out that unnecessary constraints are being put on the total supply of energy—one of the more robust arguments along these lines has been put forward, perhaps surprisingly, by a Marxist scholar, James Heartfield, whose thesis is captured in the title of his book: *Green Capitalism: Manufacturing Scarcity in an Age of Abundance*.[22] This, however, does not ultimately affect Tainter's thesis: it does not matter *why* energy is scarce, only that it is so.

Let us now turn to Tainter's treatment of Spengler and Toynbee in the opening sections of the book whose theories of collapse he describes as 'incorrect' and 'virtually without scientific merit', while 'economic explanations', such as his own, 'are logically superior'. He seeks entirely to dismiss their work on the grounds that they share 'a) reliance on a biological growth analogy; (b) reliance on value judgements; and (c) explanation by reference to intangibles'.[23] Let us deal with each of these in turn. Tainter argues that biological analogies are misplaced:

> For human societies, as most social scientists recognize, the biological analogy can identify no such controlling mechanisms. It is necessary then to fall back on arguments that are openly vitalistic—that some mysterious, internal, dynamic force leads to the 'flowering and decay' of civilizations. Vitalistic arguments of this form are indefensible, for any such internal force is inherently unknowable, unspecifiable, unmeasurable, and unexplainable. This analogy, like so many of the explanatory themes discussed previously, does not advance the cause of understanding. It explains a mystery by reference to a mystery, and so explains nothing.[24]

Just seven pages after making this statement, when Tainter starts his own discussion of civilisational collapse, his first sentence is: 'Human societies

and political organizations, *like all living systems*, are maintained by a continuous flow of energy. … Energy flow and sociopolitical organization must *evolve* in harmony.'[25] It is not clear why Tainter's biological analogies are valid while those of Spengler and Toynbee are not.

In a 'somewhat patronizing account',[26] Tainter considers the approaches of Spengler and Toynbee, who he frequently conflates, as 'not fruitful' and 'useless'. He has a problem with the term 'civilisation'; Tainter prefers 'complex society'. He argues that a 'civilisation' is too nebulous a concept to define, it is 'vague and intuitive' and entails 'an almost unavoidable element of unscientific value judgement in the very concept'. 'What distinguishes "civilized" from "uncivilized" societies?', he asks. He seems to ignore the many pages of the *Decline* in which Spengler points out exactly what is the difference between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in his conception as outlined in Chapter 6. 'How do we recognize a civilized society?', he asks. Again he seems to ignore the entire first three volumes of Toynbee's *Study of History*.[27] In particular, Toynbee points out that 'primitive societies … are relatively short-live, are restricted to relatively narrow geographical areas and embrace relatively small numbers of people', while civilisations occupy large geographical areas 'and embrace more human beings than could be mustered by all the primitive societies taken together since the emergence of the human race'.[28] This is neither a value judgement nor an intuition, but a basic fact and recognition of the distinction between what Tainter himself would call a 'complex society' and one that is not —the difference in terminology cannot mask the fact that Toynbee is describing exactly what Tainter describes. Let us study what Tainter says himself to compare it with Toynbee's statement:

> Complexity is generally understood to refer to such things as the size of a society, the number and distinctiveness of its parts, the variety of specialized social roles that it incorporates, the number of distinct social personalities present, and the variety of mechanisms for organizing these into a coherent, functioning whole. Augmenting any of these dimensions increases the complexity of a society. Hunter-gatherer societies (by way of illustrating one contrast in complexity) contain no more than a few dozen distinct social personalities, while modern European censuses recognize 10,000 to 20,000 unique

> occupational roles, and industrial societies may contain overall more than 1,000,000 different kinds of social personalities.[29]

In my view, there is no substantive difference between how Toynbee distinguishes between 'primitive' and 'civilised' and how Tainter distinguishes between 'simpler' and 'more complex' beyond merely cosmetic features of their respective languages. In fact, Tainter's 'less nebulous' concept of complex societies opens him up to the criticism that he creates a false level of unity in his analysis, a charge that could not be levelled at Spengler or Toynbee, who operate at a greater level of sophistication. 'Tainter seems to think of social systems as though they were firms, subject to analysis with balance-sheets that unambiguously reckon profit and loss. Yet we know better. What benefits one group or faction within a population may not benefit others indeed, quite the contrary. Nor, even for circumscribed groups, do we have an *a priori* unit of measurement as to what constitutes a *benefit*.'[30]

Tainter goes on to claim that the word 'civilization' conjures up the idea that they 'display artistic, architectural, and literary styles that are similar in structure (if not in form and content) to our own; hence civilized societies are those like us.' This seems an unfair criticism of Spengler, who is remarkable for his consistent cultural relativism as my analysis has stressed in this study. We might also point out that, as we have seen, Tainter himself uses the phrase 'dark age' to describe a post-collapse society—which seems much more value-laden than Spengler's treatment of a culture in springtime.

It seems that Tainter has a pro-civilisational bias that slips into his language even as he will not admit it. He says, 'to [Spengler], civilizations are undesirable, even evil.'[31] But this is not the case. Spengler simply states it as a neutral observation that a 'civilisation' phase corresponds to his Winter period following the Spring, Summer, and Autumn periods of the 'culture' phase. As we saw, far from viewing the situation as 'evil', Spengler encouraged people to come fully to terms with the fact that they are in Winter and to embrace 'technics' in a bid to ensure that Western civilisation does not quite exit world history just yet, even as he recognises the inevitable cannot be forestalled forever. Furthermore, it is not as if Tainter's work, 'dependent upon contemporary concepts of economic analysis', succeeds in being 'free from the value judgments of western

intellectual life'. For example, his 'decision to interpret collapse in terms of the disintegration of complex societies, in which the complexity that matters is essentially a political complexity, is just as subject to the unconscious imposition of value judgments as analyses that turn on civilization'.[32]

Tainter argues that Toynbee's claim that 'civilisations are in their nature progressive movements' is an example of a value judgement. There are two problems with this argument. First, Tainter takes Toynbee out of context: the full sentence reads '*the growth of* civilisations are in their nature progressive movements.' Second, he spends many pages establishing exactly what he means by 'progressive' and tests the definition against the empirical evidence. 'Progressive', in this context, is a neutral descriptive term and not a value judgement to describe the tendency of civilisations to move from smaller to larger, or to use Tainter's terminology, from 'simpler' to 'more complex'. He rejects geographic and military expansion and the overcoming of physical obstacles through mastery of the environment alone as sufficient to define 'growth'. Toynbee then outlines what economists would recognise as specialisation under the division of labour leading to the lengthening of the structure of production to make it more roundabout but, lacking this vocabulary, he calls it 'simplification' or 'etherialization'.[33] But, for Toynbee, this purely economic development alone cannot define civilisational growth because it is too externally focused. Internal challenges arise, especially issues of organisation and governance within the civilisation, which come about with mass and scale—a basic fact recognised by the elite theorists such as Gaetano Mosca who described the same process as going from 'feudal' to 'bureaucratic'.[34] Toynbee defines it as follows:

> We conclude that a given series of successful responses to successive challenges is to be interpreted as a manifestation of growth if, as the series proceeds, the action tends to shift from the field of an external environment, physical or human, to the for interieur of the growing personality or civilization. In so far as this grows and continues to grow, it has to reckon less and less with challenges delivered by external forces and demanding responses on an outer battlefield, and more and more with challenges that are presented by itself to itself in an inner arena. Growth means that the growing personality or

> civilization tends to become its own environment and its own challenger and its own field of action. In other words, the criterion of growth is progress towards self-determination[.][35]

It seems to me that Toynbee here outlines *precisely* what Tainter means by 'increasing complexity'—this is Tainter's entire thesis:

> Complex societies are problem-solving organizations, in which more parts, different kinds of parts, more social differentiation, more inequality, and more kinds of centralization and control emerge as circumstances require. Growth of complexity has involved a change from small, internally homogeneous, minimally differentiated groups characterized by equal access to resources, shifting, ephemeral leadership, and unstable political formations, to large, heterogeneous, internally differentiated, class structured, controlled societies in which the resources that sustain life are not equally available to all.[36]

Again, it strikes me that there is no substantive difference between Tainter's description and Toynbee's.

Tainter broadens his critique to include Brooks Adams and Sorokin. He goes on to label Adams, Spengler, Toynbee, and Sorokin—along with writers from Plato and Polybius to Machiavelli—as ascribing civilisational decline to 'mystical factors'. He writes:

> Mystical explanations rely on concepts like 'decadence,' 'vigor,' or 'senility'; societies are ranked according to these subjective factors, and collapse is explained accordingly. 'Decadent' societies, in this view, are seen negatively, and are axiomatically liable to disintegrate. Many, many such theories have been developed, of great diversity, indeed often of diametrically-opposite views. They are united in their lack of concern with empirically knowable or observable factors, and in their reliance on an author's subjective assessment of individual societies.[37]

The claim that the three million words of Toynbee's *Study of History* which *sets out to be empirical* has a 'lack of concern with empirically knowable or

observable factors', or that Spengler's massive *Decline*, which goes out of its way to make detailed civilisational comparisons, make *no* observations surely cannot stand; especially when one considers that 'Tainter's account of the Roman Empire depends, ironically, almost entirely on literary sources rather than archaeological evidence.'[38] Tainter justifies his stance by asserting that he is carrying out 'objective social science' while his targets are engaged in 'mysticism'.[39]

One might ask Tainter whether it is a 'subjective assessment' that Western society was, to use Sorokin's terms, more 'ideational' in the Middle Ages and is more 'sensate' today? Were Vico, Spengler, or Glubb being opinionated or pointing out an obvious fact when they suggested that cities and the development of mass and scale lead to a certain type of intellectualism which diminishes the superstitions that drove the spirit of prior ages and leads to a more cynical and materialistic attitude? For Tainter, these are not and *cannot be* observable facts but are rather 'explanation by reference to intangibles … Mystical explanations simply fail to identify any isolatable, observable, measurable factor controlling cultural change.'[40] One must wonder whether a lens that cannot observe the role of human psychology or religion in history is fit to comment on human affairs at all. Tainter essentially denies concepts such as the metaphysical, human spirit, social zeitgeists, governing philosophies, attitudes about the relationship between humans and their environment, ideologies, because they cannot be measured by the tools of science. What account of history can possibly *ignore* these factors? To put this more simply, do the beliefs of people in various societies matter and affect how those people behave, which decisions and actions they take? It beggars belief that Tainter seriously would deny this. His critique culminates with him quoting a few key lines from Toynbee's most prominent critics, who I reviewed in Chapter 8. He includes such barbs from Hugh Trevor-Roper as 'He compares himself with the prophet Ezekiel; and certainly, at times, he is just as unintelligible'. Tainter declares: 'Despite the differences in approach between Spengler and Toynbee, these quotes could be interchangeably used for either author. It seems almost unsporting to treat Spengler and Toynbee so severely, but these quotations introduce most of the problems in mystical explanations.'[41] His treatment ends on this somewhat derisive note.

This brusque treatment of Spengler and Toynbee is made more curious when one considers, as G.W. Bowersock points out, that 'Tainter is a tough-minded scholar who dislikes facts.'[42] Bowersock directs us to the following passage:

> The premise of the present approach is that if the logic of an argument is faulty, a discussion of factual matters is largely unnecessary. If the climatic shift or the intruders could not have caused the society to collapse, then all the evidence for or against these is interesting, but immaterial. Hence in what follows the major focus will be on the logic of proposed explanations. Factual matters will from time to time be discussed, but these are never of major importance.[43]

Thus, in the same text as he accuses his predecessors of a 'lack of concern with empirically knowable or observable factors', Tainter reveals that his own argument is, after all, not empirical but rather based on an *a priori* rationalism. Let us write out Tainter's argument against Spengler and Toynbee thus far as a logical proof:

1. Premise: Only scientific knowledge can explain the collapse of civilisations.
2. Premise: 'Mystical factors' are not scientific knowledge.
3. Conclusion: Therefore, 'mystical factors' cannot explain the collapse of civilisations.

The first premise here is nothing but a *faith* position. Why can only scientific knowledge explain the collapse of civilisation? This cannot be proven one way or the other, one might even say it is 'mystical'. But aside from that, what if the factors cannot be isolated and measured? This is simply what behavioural economists have called 'the availability heuristic', which is to say the scientific method is available to Tainter and therefore he assumes it *must* provide the answer.[44] The famed economist Ludwig von Mises argued that scientific measurement was impossible in human affairs *including* in the study of economics, since subjective valuations cannot be isolated, and even if they could, in the real-world factors cannot be held constant.[45] Lionel Robbins, whose definition of economics as 'the

allocation of scarce means which have alternative uses' is accepted by most economists, largely concurred with Mises, and stated that the Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility—which is absolutely central to Tainter's work—'whether true or false, can never be verified by observation or introspection'.[46] Thus, *economic* factors—by Tainter's own definition—must be classed also as 'mystical factors', because, to use his own words, they 'simply fail to identify any isolatable, observable, measurable factor controlling cultural change'.

The second premise is also not as clear-cut as it may first appear. Let us consider the two following statements:

- The Arab conquests that took place in the 600s were carried out by men of religious zeal who had followed the prophet Muhammed.
- Oliver Cromwell was a Puritan who imposed his values on England between 1653 and 1658.

Can it be verified by science that human beings are motivated by their beliefs? The entire field of psychology and motivation studies may take issue with the notion that it cannot.[47] Can it be shown that human beings have everywhere and always had some need for religious feeling? The entire field of group evolutionary psychology suggests that it can be.[48] The 'mystical factors' at which Tainter tilts need not be more complicated than saying simply: 'at some points in history, generally when civilisations are growing, humans have been motivated towards martial conquest and spiritualism, and at other times in history, generally when they are declining, they have been motivated towards materialist gain, luxury, and comfort.' This is not particularly difficult to demonstrate with evidence from records of their sentiments or to quantify statistically as Sorokin showed at length. But let us not forget that Tainter has already declared that facts are 'never of major importance'.

Despite these blind spots in his own analysis, and despite his economism and scientism, Tainter succeeds in providing an elegant and somewhat easy to understand account of what will ultimately lead to collapse at a material level. If it has a weakness, it is primarily in its author's insistence that cultural factors do not and *cannot* matter because they cannot be easily measured, and on his reductive mono-causal explanation. 'Tainter seems to assume that any successful theory of imperial collapse must always link the

same result with the same causes, and that the causes so identified must always produce the same result.'[49] Thus critics of *Collapse* have found it, 'over-simplified',[50] 'solipsistic',[51] and complained that 'Tainter does not pay sufficient attention to the now well-recognised dangers of privileging a monocausal explanation of change.'[52] While I am inclined to agree with such assessments (because an analysis that cannot recognise the role of such fundamental factors as culture and ethnicity is *necessarily* incomplete—missing the 'human' element), nothing in Tainter's core thesis is incompatible with our other authors so long as his single-mindedness is removed. It strikes me that his discussion of bread and circuses, the welfare state, and so on contradict virtually nothing in, for example, Glubb. Furthermore, despite appearances, Tainter's exclusive focus on the ruling class and its need to maintain legitimacy—whether he is aware of it or not—aligns him with the analysis of the elitist school and has several points of convergence with Spengler, Toynbee, and Evola, whose analyses also nearly exclusively focus on the ruling class. Finally, despite never stating it explicitly, the will to hold on to power through legitimatising mechanism is central to all his calculations as are the passive 'demands' of the masses for bread and circuses.

1 Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

2 Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Press, 2005).

3 Danilo Brozovic, 'Societal Collapse: A Literature Review', *Futures*, 135 (2023), pp. 1–24.

4 See David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (University of California Press: 2005).

5 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, pp. 91, 94.

6 Ugi Bardi, *The Seneca Effect: Why Growth is Slow but Collapse is Rapid* (New York: Springer, 2017), p. 17.

7 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, pp. 91–92.

8 Kenneth B. Taylor, 'The Passing of Western Civilization', *Futures*, 122 (2020), p. 5.

9 For my discussion of marginalism, see Neema Parvini, *The Defenders of Liberty: Human Nature, Individualism, and Property Rights* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 211–242.

10 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, p. 93.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

13 Edward Dutton and J.O.A. Rayner-Hilles, *The Past is a Future Country: The Coming Conservative Demographic Revolution* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2022), p. 13.

14 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, p. 103.

15 Dutton and Rayner-Hilles, *The Past is a Future Country*, p. 13.

16 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, p. 117.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

21 Alex Lawson, 'UK Power Prices Hit Record High Amid Cold Snap and Lack of Wind', *The Guardian* (11 December 2022): https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/11/uk-power-prices-hit-record-high-amid-cold-snap-and-lack-of-wind-power.

22 See James Heartfield, *Green Capitalism: Manufacturing Scarcity in an Age of Abundance* (London: OpenMute, 2008).

23 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, pp. 194, 84.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

26 G.W. Bowersock, 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 18 (1991), p. 119.

27 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, pp. 40–41.

28 Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, ed. D.C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 35.

29 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, p. 23.

30 James B. Rule, 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*', *Population and Environment*, 11:1 (Fall 1989), p. 74.

31 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, pp. 40, 41.

32 Bowersock, 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*', p. 120.

33 For my discussion of this concept at length see Parvini, *The Defenders of Liberty*, pp. 189–190.

34 See Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022), p. 22.

35 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, p. 208.

36 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, pp. 37–38.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

38 Bowersock, 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*', p. 120.

39 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, p. 41.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

42 Bowersock, ‘Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*’, p. 119.

43 Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*, p. 43.

44 See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York and London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 129–145.

45 Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 30–71.

46 Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd edn. (1932; London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 137.

47 See Richard M. Ryan (ed.), *The Human Handbook of Motivation*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

48 See David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin’s Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

49 Rule, ‘Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*’, p. 73.

50 Robert Rousselle, ‘Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*’, *The Classical World*, 83:6 (July–August 1990), p. 543.

51 Bowersock, ‘Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*’, p. 121.

52 Bruce G. Trigger, ‘Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*’, *Man*, 24:2 (June 1989), p. 375

# *12: Peter Turchin*

Peter Turchin (1957–) has been based at the University of Connecticut since 1994. His father, like Sorokin, was a Soviet exile who moved to the United States in 1977 while Turchin was still studying for his BA in Biology at Moscow University. He transferred to New York University and eventually completed his doctorate at Duke in 1985. Like Tainter, Turchin had some experience working for the USDA, specifically for the Southern Forest Research Station. He specialised in zoology and ecology. He founded *Cliodynamics: The Journal of Quantitative History and Cultural Evolution* in 2010 and shortly after joined David Sloan Wilson at the Evolution Institute, where he is a director. As with my treatment of Tainter, this chapter will first outline Turchin's basic theory of the rise and fall of states, and then turn to his claims to be producing 'science' in contrast to the 'mere' Prophets of Doom discussed from Chapters 1 to 10.

Turchin has sought to bring mathematical modelling, or more accurately 'system dynamics',[1] to bear on the study of history. He has not embraced the label 'big history', which has come to be applied to Tainter and others, and prefers 'cliodynamics', which he claims is a new sub-discipline of science.[2] I will return to the implications of this to the current study later, but first, let us gain a feel for Turchin's basic ideas. Turchin introduced his core models in *Historical Dynamics* (2003) (hereafter *Dynamics*), but a little like how *Revolt Against the Modern World* forms a skeleton key to the rest of Evola's works, almost all Turchin's subsequent works elaborate on aspects of the core theory outlined in *Dynamics*. The book effectively rests on two interrelated models. The first advances what he calls 'Metaethnic Frontier Theory' (MFT), taking his starting assumptions from the fourteenth-century Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, on whom we touched in Chapter 1.[3] For Turchin, Ibn Khaldun 'discovered the key to history' when he outlined his notion of *asabiya* or 'collective solidarity'.[4] 'Much of [Turchin's work] is essentially Ibn-Khaldun translated into differential equations (an intellectual debt Turchin readily acknowledges).'[5] The second model is built on the Demographic-Structural Theory (DST) first pioneered by Jack Goldstone in 1991,[6] which forms the basis of what

Turchin calls ‘secular cycles’. For Turchin, MFT explains the rise of empires, while DST explains their fall—but, as we shall see, they amount to the same explanation. The most important full-length books related to *Dynamics* are *War and Peace and War* (2006), which attempts to present the same information essentially as a conventional history book using descriptive prose as opposed to the models and data, and (co-authored with Sergey A. Nefedov) *Secular Cycles* (2009), which is an extended application of DST to eight different historical moments across four states —in effect, some new case studies further demonstrating the thesis.[7]

The heart of MFT is outlined succinctly by Tainter, in an otherwise hostile (and typically dismissive) review:

> Ibn Khaldun argued that the founders of dynasties rule well and tax lightly. Succeeding generations, though, develop a taste for luxury, resulting in higher taxation and declining welfare. Late-phase dynasties are challenged by desert nomads who have high degrees of *asabiya*, defined as collective solidarity or a capacity for collective action. Nomads with *asabiya* topple dynasties that lack it, starting the cycle anew. Ibn Khaldun perhaps meant his theory as a critique, but Turchin takes it literally. It might be called the ‘team spirit’ theory of history.[8]

The desert nomads with *asabiya* bear a striking resemblance to the ‘barbarians’ we have encountered in the Age of Gods in Vico, in the various heroes in Carlyle, in the Age of Fear in Adams, in the early Spring in Spengler, in the ideational phase in Sorokin, in the Time of Troubles/Age of Heroes in Toynbee, in the various ‘mini’ Bronze Ages in Evola, and in the Age of Pioneers or ‘Outburst’ of Glubb. Each of these writers talked about a certain spirit that these otherwise ‘savage’ men possessed. They are seen time and again through history, a seemingly marginal group who live on the outer fringes of a vast empire who somehow, despite being outnumbered and technologically outclassed, end up taking over vast swathes of land previously held by a seemingly superior ‘civilisation’ or empire: the Macedonians, the Franks after the Roman empire, the Arabs who conquered Byzantium and Persia, the Mongols, the Mamluks, the Seljuks, and so on.

It is interesting that, despite so many methodological and philosophical differences, they all seem to agree on this. This expansive phase Turchin labels ‘integrative’, ‘characterized by a centralizing tendency, unified elites,

and a strong state that maintains order and internal stability' which facilitates 'internal cohesion', 'external wars of conquest' and 'population growth'.[9] Toynbee, who had a much dimmer view of 'barbarian' groups than the others, seemed to make a delineation between 'mere' barbarians and creative minorities who solved problems and 'returned' to be active participants in history after a period of 'withdrawal'.[10] As I indicated in Chapter 8, while this mechanism is not particularly vital to Toynbee's overall scheme, it is vital to Turchin's MFT model. The geographic features that allow for Toynbee's 'withdrawal' are frontiers that provide adequate cover for a minority. For Turchin, although he does not acknowledge Toynbee, such frontiers allow for the 'incubation' of *asabiya* before the minority 'bursts out' back onto the historical stage.

Dingxin Zhao provides another neat summary of MFT and provides one for DST:

> This book intends to show that the rise and fall of agrarian empires can be modeled mathematically based on two cyclic mechanisms. The first is the wax and wane of asabiya (a concept Peter Turchin borrows from Ibn Khaldun to refer to the level of solidarity of the people within a polity; however, the book provides neither a clear definition of the concept nor a way to measure it empirically). Turchin argues that metaethnic competition at the frontiers not only enhances the asabiya of each ethnic group but also enables a group with higher asabiya to conquer the weaker groups and establish an empire. However, once an empire is established, asabiya will gradually decline at its center due to the lack of external threats and internal competition. Meanwhile, new metaethnhic competitions at the frontiers will lead to the emergence of a new group with higher asabiya. This group crushes the old empire. Thus the cycle goes. Turchin's second mechanism concerns the interaction between the human population density and political fortune of an empire. Here, he argues that the interaction between demography and politics will lead to the following cyclic pattern: increase in population à war and political instability à depopulation à political stability à increase in population.[11]

Turchin's analysis for the DST portions of his work, borrowed largely from Goldstone, is notable for the extent to which—whether either author is aware of it—it conforms to the principles outlined by elite theory.[12] Turchin quotes Goldstone perfectly describing some of the basic tenets of elite theory:

> It is a profound and repeated finding that the mere facts of poverty and inequality or even increases in these conditions, do not lead to political or ethnic violence. In order for popular discontent or distress to create large-scale conflicts, there must be some elite leadership to mobilize popular groups and to create linkages between them. There must also be some vulnerability of the state in the form of internal divisions and economic or political reverses. Otherwise, popular discontent is unvoiced, and popular opposition is simply suppressed.[13]

This demonstrates two crucial facts: first, in most times and places, the bulk of the population simply *do not matter* in the determination of history, which is to say that—whether broadly contented or discontented—they represent the ruled and not the rulers. This runs directly counter to democratic or populist or even Marxist notions of history, which are, to put it bluntly, merely wrong.

Second, the *key* factor which differentiates a successful ruling class from an unsuccessful one is their will to hold onto power as against the will of counter-elites to take power from them. This is the 'human' element that is so sorely lacking in Tainter. For Turchin, the crucial factor that precipitates this will is group unity among the elites, or *asabiya*. He shows an intuitive grasp of elite theory when he discusses elite dynamics foreshadowing a state breakdown:

> As a result, the elites tend to lose their unity and split along numerous fission lines: new elites versus old, one religious faction against the other, regional elites against the center, and so on. Because there are not enough resources for everybody, certain segments of elites, or groups aspiring to elite status, inevitably end up as the losers. We refer to them as the counterelites, or dissident elites. Usually, the counterelites do not constitute a true sociological group, because there is little

> that unifies them apart from hatred for the existing regime and a burning desire to bring it down.[14]

The only key point of possible departure from the elite theorists in Turchin's treatment of elite dynamics is in his separation of elites and states. He maintains 'states are not simply created and manipulated by dominant classes; they are agents in their own right, and they compete with the elites in appropriating resources from the economy.'[15] The elite theorists certainly recognise centralisation and bureaucracy as having a certain logic of their own, which culminate in what James Burnham called *The Managerial Revolution* in which the distinction between a private capitalist class and the public sector of civil servants and bureaucrats effectively merge.[16] However, when power is less centralised, or, to use Mosca's term, more 'feudal', power is effectively dispersed between what Jouvenel calls 'rival castles'. This is viewed principally as failure of political technology: some factor is preventing effective centralisation and thus some sections of elites are allowed relative autonomy. Several elite theorists such as Mosca and Burnham viewed this situation as favourable and providing the ruled an enhanced modicum of freedom, while others, such as Jouvenel and Schmitt, insisted that power, in practice, tends everywhere and always towards absolutism and will not brook a rival for long.

In this latter analysis, 'the state' and 'power' are synonymous regardless of the group of elites who come to rule—it is simply the biggest castle and, in the end, will brook no rival. Pareto, meanwhile, saw oscillations between coercive elites who rely on force (lions) and manipulative elites who rely on persuasion (foxes) all through history. Thus far several of our Prophets of Doom, most notably Vico, Spengler, Evola, and Glubb, have, in so many words, recognised their own version of this, but have preferred the ancient archetypes of warriors (first estate), priests (second estate), merchants (third estate), and peasants (fourth estate) to describe the process. In Pareto's terms, warriors and peasants are both lion types while priests and merchants are both fox types. Note that in practice, as pointed out as far back as Polybius's *Anacyclosis*, the peasants can never rule themselves and elect instead a Caesar.

What is particularly interesting about Turchin's work, perhaps despite his own wishes, is that he provides a quantitative architecture to patterns that

have been spotted by his predecessors. Before we get to those patterns, it is necessary to provide some extra details about the two models. The MFT model has two variables which dictate the *asabiya* (collective solidarity) of an elite group:

- 'The first variable is the degree to which the environment of a group is pacified. Because the primary source of intergroup variation is conflict between groups, location in a stateless environment should promote asabiya increase, while location near the center of a large polity (far from boundaries where warfare mainly occurs) should promote asabiya decrease.'
- 'The second variable is population density in relation to the carrying capacity. Density pushing at the subsistence limits promotes intragroup competition, and causes asabiya to decline. Low population density implies low intragroup competition, and conditions favoring the increase of asabiya. Note that this variable is correlated with the first, since mortality rates in stateless environments tend to be higher than in the centers of large polities, resulting in population densities substantially below the carrying capacity.'[17]

In lay terms, living in the harsh desert, or in the mountains, caves, and so on, strengthens group cohesion while living in a city surrounded by luxuries weakens it—remember that Ibn Khaldun's law is that groups with high *asabiya* defeat groups with low *asabiya*—it is difficult not to think of the Taliban in Afghanistan against the highly-trained American army. To demonstrate the second point, Turchin uses the example of the post-Black Death recovery of England as contrasted with that of Egypt. In England, 'wages rose, rents and grain prices dropped, unemployment decreased, and per capita incomes grew', while in Egypt, 'wages dropped, land rents and grain prices rose, and unemployment levels increased.'[18] The two variables outlined above combine to explain the reason for the difference:

> After 1250 Egypt was ruled by a particularly cohesive and militarily capable group of elites: specialized slave-warriors known as Mamluks (as evidenced, for example, by their success at repelling the Mongol invasions in the second half of the thirteenth century). English peasants could resist elites by

> hiding in the hills and forests, of which there was an abundance in a depopulated England. Additionally, the longbow negated the advantage in military power usually enjoyed by the elites. By contrast, Egypt's narrow strip of arable land between uninhabitable desert left no room for evasive tactics. After the Black Death, Mamluks were able to use their tremendous coercive power to maintain the preplague level of resource extraction from a greatly diminished rural population. Extremely high levels of exploitation of individual peasants precluded any demographic revival.[19]

In England, such circumstances segued neatly into a 'secular cycle' explained by DST. Here, the basic assumptions are the same as in MFT, but rather than adjusting variables to predict *asabiya*, DST focuses on the population level to predict whether a state will strengthen or break down. Thus, in England, the eventual stabilisation and centralisation of government under the Tudors from 1485 led to a population boom, which leads to increased urbanisation and wealth, but then stagflation, crisis, and depression which set it for the next cycle.[20] An increase in population also leads to an overproduction of elites who must now compete for limited resources, leading to intra-elite conflict. In this case, the result was the English Civil War.

By contrast, the Mamluk's fortunes were terminal, and they were destroyed by the Ottomans in 1517. Turchin does not attempt to explain the rise and fall of the Mamluks in any detail and, in focusing on this single case, we can see some weaknesses in the mathematical approach to history as opposed to the more intuitive approach taken by the older Prophets of Doom. Since this concerns the Arab world, it would perhaps be most illustrative to contrast Turchin with Glubb. In *Dynamics*, he merely says, 'from 1250 to 1517 Egypt was ruled by a group of specialized warriors known as Mamluks. … In the postplague period Mamluks used their tremendous collective power in an attempt to maintain the same level of resource extraction from a greatly diminished rural population, resulting in a much higher level of exploitation of individual peasants.'[21] As Tainter noted in his review, here we can see 'Turchin treats elites like an inert organic mass that expands and contracts with resources, ignoring the organizational aspects of hierarchy. A need for organization may raise the

proportion of elite administrators regardless of resources, as in the later Roman Empire.'[22] In other words, Turchin cannot capture qualitative changes in an elite.

The DST model predicts that if a population is declining, as in the Mamluk case, then *asabiya* stays high. In fact, as Glubb shows, the Mamluk elite experienced a degeneration during the 267 years of their history. In *Fate*, he writes, 'From 1309 to 1341, the Mameluke Empire was everywhere victorious and possessed the finest army in the world. For the ensuing hundred years the wealth of the Mameluke Empire was fabulous, slowly leading to luxury, the relaxation of discipline and to decline, with ever more bitter internal political rivalries. Finally the empire collapsed in 1517, as a result of military defeat by the Ottomans.'[23] Glubb was not a casual observer of Mamluk history, he had written an entire book on the topic.[24] He argues that the Mamluks did not merely become decadent through riches but underwent a circulation of elites and a degradation of the warrior caste:

> On 26th November 1382, the last of Al Nasir's feeble descendants was dethroned. His successor, Malik al Dhahir Barqooq, was a Circassian, born in the Caucasus and sold as a slave boy into Egypt. The Circassians were a mountain people from the Caucasus, in no way related to the Turkish tribes of the steppes, who had hitherto supplied all the Mamlook sultans. Thenceforward nearly all the sultans were to be Circassians. The change of race introduced many modifications in the nature of the Mamlook regime. The Circassians were less ruthless and less martial than the Turks. Under them, the discipline of the army was gradually relaxed and its efficiency deteriorated. In Egypt, the regime became more humane, the Mamlooks learned Arabic, were well educated, cultured and polite. Unfortunately the greatness of Egypt had been maintained precisely by the fierce combativeness of the Turks. Under the Circassians, the country was gradually to weaken and then to collapse.[25]

How could 'unscientific' Glubb catch this cycle while Turchin's model could not? Either Glubb is not correct that the Mamluks followed his

typical pattern for the fate of empires or something in Turchin's model is wrong. I would like to posit that it is the latter.

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that Malthusian-Ricardian theory is correct,[26] Turchin may still be incorrect that population capacity is the only factor that determines the efficacy of an elite group. Even though it appears fatal, this need not undo his entire system. For example, if Glubb is correct that the Circassians represented a decrease in elite cohesion and ruthlessness, even as the population decreased, then Turchin need only model *the effects of sustained luxury on an elite group* to rectify the issue. This would also rectify what appears to be a contradiction in Turchin's claim that 'such a happy state of events (for the elites) cannot continue for long'.[27] Except for the one case where he claims it continued for 267 years for the Mamluks! Turchin's model seems to imagine that the only an overproduction of elites can lead to a breakdown of their efficacy, but he does not consider that their intrinsic qualities can degrade as men of one type are replaced with those of a different type. This is strange as his MFT model seems at some level to understand that increased luxury decreases *asabiya*.

The more interesting part of Turchin's work, for us, is that he shows clearly how, again and again, the success of the initial expansion phase, the 'outburst' as Glubb called it, starts to sow the seeds of its own destruction. Material success and urbanisation weaken the collective solidarity and character of the elite that brought about the expansion, while population growth greatly exacerbates these problems. This largely follows the pattern outlined by the other Prophets of Doom, although it should be noted that his 'secular cycles' are shorter, about the same length as Glubb's cycle of the rise and fall of empires, about 250 years. Turchin does not attempt to tie these together in a larger civilisational history, although he does say that the 'collapse' of any given state is 'perhaps followed by a revival, and another imperial cycle'.[28] This is certainly the case in the Middle East in which we follow successive empires from the Ancient Assyrians to the Ottoman Empire that terminated in the First World War. His treatment of medieval England and France as 'multiethnic empires' is perhaps more questionable ('the multiethnic nature of France during most of its existence is the reason I refer to it as an empire'[29]). Few would agree that the expanse of English history between 1150 and today saw the rise and fall of three distinct empires.

Before turning to methodological questions of Turchin's claims to be producing 'science' as against mere 'prophecy', his recent work on religion is of great relevance to several of the claims made by the other authors covered in this book. In a recent (controversial) article, Turchin and eleven co-authors from around the world[30] showed that what they have called 'Big Gods' develop chiefly as a *political technology* to maintain a multiethnic empire. Incidentally, this was noted by the elite theorist Mosca in 1895.[31] In other words, universal moralising religions, what Toynbee called 'universal churches'—which recall, for him, was a late-civilisation development—are a product of more complex societies. This is contrary to what has been claimed by many scholars, which is that universalising social technologies are the engines driving civilisations.

We have seen throughout this study, again and again, from multiple authors, that almost every civilisation or empire has started with a 'bursting out' of a 'barbarian' group of the Bronze Age variety who most people would think of as 'primitive'. These barbarian groups had religions which helped to animate them in their spirit and zeal in the great 'bursting forth', but these religions were not of the moralising and universalising stripe. These were people who practically believed in magic, it is the wide and awe-struck eyes at the lightning bolt described by Vico, the Age of Fear described by Adams. As we saw in Evola, they embodied a crude approximation of what he called 'solar-masculine' energy, a kind of vitality. For such men, religion is not universalist, but necessarily becomes particularist because they can embody nothing else: a battle of friend against enemy, ingroup versus outgroup, crusade versus jihad. This is the *asabiya* described by Ibn Khaldun and modelled by Turchin.

The lunar-feminine 'petty moralising' of the bourgeois variety against which Evola revolted, like Nietzsche before him, represents a quite different strain of religion, what Turchin and his collaborators have called 'Big God', which is used to *consolidate* the gains made by the men of the first stripe. Evola called this kind of religion 'exterior' or 'exoteric', Toynbee might have called it the ephemeral institution or merely temporal. As Gobineau argued, the most forceful to do so among our authors, such a universal religion may help to maintain a civilisation for a time, but it certainly cannot save it from collapse after the original animating spirit of the early phase is a distant memory. Since the universal religion was not the ultimate *cause* of the civilisation (it was the spirit, strength, and *asabiya* of the

founding elite)—as this recent research by Turchin and others has shown—it cannot be expected to act as its saviour. To deal in concrete terms, this is the difference between the Mongols and the Golden Horde, or the early Arab Conquests and the Umayyad Caliphate, or the conquests of Charlemagne and what became the Holy Roman Empire. The raiders of the early period must embody an heroic spirit, while the rulers of the later period have the problems of law, order, and social cohesion to solve. If the raiders had conquered vast swathes of territory comprising disparate peoples who spoke different languages and practised different religions, one might see how the need for a universal religion might become an imperative.

Civilisation begins with a set of particularisms (such as ethnicity, a local god, local customs and rituals) and only later does the complexity of society enable and call for universalism and the 'Big Gods' follow; they do not create complex societies. This may be confusing since, ostensibly, the *same* religion can serve as a particularist religion in the early phase and then as a universal one in the later phase—the Zoroastrianism of Cyrus the Great likely bore little to no resemblance to the Zoroastrianism practised in the Sassanid Empire over 700 years later. This is the difference between Yahweh in the Old Testament, unmistakably a particularist god only for the Jews, and God in the New Testament who is, after the coming of Jesus, 'for everyone'. But as we have seen, in the medieval era, Christianity was 'Germanised' and somehow once again became particularist (the God of the Crusades), and then somehow oscillated back to being a universal religion of peace and love once more to coincide with European nations running large multiethnic empires.

Let us turn now to some methodological issues. On his blog, *Cliodynamica*, Turchin has sought to differentiate his work from the label 'cyclical history' as follows:

> Cliodynamics is entirely different. Its roots are in nonlinear dynamical systems. We don't go out looking for cycles; but we don't shy away from them when there is robust evidence for them. In Structural-Demographic Theory, in particular, oscillations arise because of nonlinear feedbacks between different interacting components of the social system (state-level society). We model the postulated feedbacks

> mathematically and determine whether our intuition that they should lead to cycles is correct.[32]

It is worth remembering that both Sorokin and Toynbee also claimed that they were not 'looking for cycles', but rather were working 'empirically'. In an earlier post, distancing himself from Strauss and Howe's *The Fourth Turning*,[33] Turchin outlines the basic difference he sees between his own scientific work and Strauss and Howe's cyclical work:

> [My model] is a scientific theory because (1) it presents a logically cohesive explanation of why change occurs and (2) it then tests critical assumptions and predictions of the theory with independently gathered data. Let me quickly deal with the second point. [Strauss and Howe's model] is not a scientific theory because it uses what I call the 'Procrustean' approach. Like the mythical Procrustes, one forces the historical record to fit a postulated cycle by stretching in some places and cutting off a bit here and there in others.[34]

In an earlier post still, Turchin also insisted that his model is not principally about making predictions, although it could be used to that end:

> Cliodynamics is not about predicting the future! The future is not predictable, except in a most trivial sense … Cliodynamics, instead, is about understanding why and how social systems change. We look for general principles ('laws', if you will), and build mathematical models based on these principles. Then comes the most critical part—testing model predictions with historical data so that we can tell which models and theories are correct, and which are not. So prediction is instrumental—it is subordinated to the main goal, that of understanding. The chief purpose of mathematics is to make sure that predictions really follow logically from the premises. Otherwise, we could wrongly reject a theory, if we mistakenly test a prediction that doesn't follow from it. It is useful to distinguish this kind of prediction, which is subordinated to the main goal of testing theories (I'll call it 'scientific prediction') from prophecy. A

> prophecy is an unconditional statement of what will happen in the future.[35]

Although Turchin never seems to deal with Spengler or Toynbee directly in his work, as Tainter does, one imagines he views their work as 'prophecy' and not 'scientific prediction'. There is a single line in *Dynamics* that mentions them, which refers to 'the failure of earlier macrohistorians (Vico, Danilevsky, Spengler, Toynbee, Sorokin) to develop *scientific theories*, that is, theories that make nonobvious predictions that can be empirically tested'.[36]

My view is that, as so often in the academic bid for novelty, 'originality', and presenting one's work as some breakthrough or discovery, the difference Turchin asserts is overstated. First, none of the authors I have covered in this book make unconditional statements of the kind Turchin suggests, rather they say, 'looking at what has happened in the past, we can see this pattern, and therefore we think something similar will happen in the future.' In essence, this is the same argument Turchin himself makes. The difference is merely in how the 'facts' are presented. In Spengler they are presented, as we saw, in poetic language; in Turchin, they are presented using quantitative data as mathematical models. What we have, in effect, is an *aesthetic preference* on Turchin's part for mathematics over 'poetry'. I believe that what we see is merely *the appearance* of scientific measurement, especially given that mathematical models in the end boil down to their starting assumptions and the quality of the data inputs.[37]

Turchin's models rely on standard macroeconomic data—much of which are based on estimates derived from accounting records, scraps of shopping lists, and receipts—and draws on the 'unscientific' Sorokin for his 'instability index'.[38] Turchin built a mathematical model based on the core theories of Ibn Khaldun, but there would be little stopping him or one of his colleagues producing the same for any of the Prophets of Doom. In 1911, the Egyptologist, W.M. Flinders Petrie, wrote a short proto-Spenglerian book on art history called *The Revolutions of Civilisation*.[39] It contains tables of data and graphs of 'fluctuations' and 'waves' that look not unlike those found in Turchin, and it was even praised later as being 'free from Spengler's mysticism … with chart and figures'.[40] To my mind, it is simply an alternative method of presenting the same information and one that is not without cost, as I have noted above. In a materialist age, the reign of

quantity is all, 'bigness is the only ideal',[41] and therefore there are strong social and even professional incentives to present one's work in this way. However, the fact remains that a verbal description can be intuitive—their very imprecision is their virtue—while mathematical models, even those as 'dynamic' and ingenious as conjured by Turchin, will always tend to be crudely reductive when dealing with human affairs.

1 Alessandro Maini, 'On *Historical Dynamics* by Peter Turchin: A Mathematical Review', *Biophysical Economics and Sustainability*, 5:3 (2020), p. 1.

2 Peter Turchin, 'Arise Cliodynamics', *Nature*, 454 (2008), pp. 34–35.

3 Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics: Why States Rise and Fall* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 50.

4 Peter Turchin, *War and Peace and War: The Rise and Fall of Empires* (New York and London: Penguin, 2007), p. 89.

5 Philip A. Schrodt, 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', *Contemporary Sociology*, 34:2 (March 2005), p. 214.

6 See Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in Early Modern England* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

7 See Peter Turchin and Sergey A. Nefedov, *Secular Cycles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

8 Joseph Tainter, 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', *Nature*, 427 (February 2004), p. 488.

9 Turchin and Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*, p. 20.

10 Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, ed. D.C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 230–240.

11 Dingxin Zhao, 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', *American Journal of Sociology*, 112:1 (July 2006), p. 308.

12 See Neema Parvini, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022).

13 Jack Goldstone quoted in Turchin and Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*, p. 8.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

16 See Parvini, *The Populist Delusion*, pp. 75–87.

17 Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*, p. 75.

18 Turchin and Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*, p. 13.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 81–110.

21 Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*, p. 146.

22 Tainter, 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', p. 488.

23 John Bagot Glubb, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival* (1978; Uckfield: Windmill Press, 2002), p. 26.

24 John Bagot Glubb, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Story of the Mamluks* (New York: Stein & Day, 1974).

25 John Bagot Glubb, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Stein & Day, 1969), p. 220.

26 Using both logical arguments and robust empirical data, I have argued to the contrary, see Neema Parvini, *The Defenders of Liberty: Human Nature, Individualism, and Property Rights* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 150–157.

27 Turchin and Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*, p. 10.

28 Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*, p. 118.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

30 Harvey Whitehouse *et al.*, 'Testing the Big Gods Hypothesis with Global Historical Data: A Review and "Retake"', *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (June 2022), pp. 1–43.

31 See Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur Livingston, trans. Hannah D. Khan (1895; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), pp. 74–75.

32 Peter Turchin, 'Cliodynamics is Not "Cyclical History"', *Cliodynamica* (18 September 2020): https://peterturchin.com/cliodynamics-is-not-cyclical-history/.

33 See William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997).

34 Peter Turchin, 'The Prophecy of the Fourth Turning', *Cliodynamica* (6 November 2017): https://peterturchin.com/prophecy-fourth-turning/.

35 Peter Turchin, 'Scientific Prediction ≠ Prophecy', *Cliodynamica* (12 April 2013): https://peterturchin.com/scientific-prediction%e2%89%a0prophecy/.

36 Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*, p. 37.

37 For my longer critique of the use of mathematical models see Neema Parvini, *The Defenders of Liberty: Human Nature, Individualism, and Property Rights* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 253–259.

38 Turchin and Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*, pp. 146, 177.

39 W.M. Flinders Petrie, *The Revolutions of Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

40 Aodh de Blacam, 'Review of Oswald Spenger, *The Decline of the West*, W.M. Flinders Petire, *The Revolutions of Civilisation* and Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion*', *The Irish Monthly*, 63:746 (August 1935), pp. 545–546.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 543.

# *13: Conclusion*

Having considered eleven Prophets of Doom, it strikes me that, despite many differences among them, there are numerous observations that recur very often in their thought. Since most of the Prophets of Doom were largely ignorant of one another, and since those who were not sought to distinguish their differences, it is logical to conclude that the convergences represent some aspect of the truth being recognised independently by different observers. I will list the ten most prominent of these:

1. The Spark, the animating spirit of the early warrior caste, is distinct from the religion that comes to predominate and maintain the later multiethnic empire, which I will call The Imperial Altar.
2. Civilisational successes—such as conquest, wealth, and education—generate their own loss conditions.
3. The Barbarism of Reflection destroys the foundations of the Imperial Altar and successfully kills any last remnants of The Spark.
4. The castes of the lion archetype (warriors and peasants) have mutual antagonisms with the castes of the fox archetype (priests or intellectuals and merchants).
5. Where the lion archetype predominates either as monarchism (warriors) or as Caesarism (peasants) ‘civilisational successes’ can be held in check for a period. They tend to create strong regimes through ruthlessness but such strength, ironically, leads to the managerial need for administration generated by growth and complexity, which in turn leads to the rise of elites of the fox archetype taking over.
6. When the fox archetype predominates, either as theocracy (priests/intellectuals) or plutarchy (merchants), ‘civilisational success’ may accelerate but, in the process, the very foundations that facilitated such success in the first place (i.e. the strong regime maintained by the lion’s ruthlessness) are eroded, eventually leading to collapse.

7. Quantity has a quality all of its own, which manifests as all that is ‘mass’: democracy, utilitarianism, standardisation, and the destruction of quality and distinction. This is a feature of the late, pre-collapse cycle.
8. Individuals of one civilisational season cannot embody the spirit of another: the Children of Winter, for example, cannot embody the Spring.
9. Civilisation is incommunicable. The ‘world-feeling’ of a people as Spengler says is ‘not transferable’. ‘What one people takes over from another—in “conversion” or in admiring feeling—is a name, dress, and mask for its own feeling, never the feeling of that other.’[1]
10. Ethnicity is a constant reality which promotes ingroup solidarity in the early cycle and becomes a problem for the ruling class to manage in the late cycle.

These ten conclusions are each deeply at odds with how people have tended to think about history in the past few decades and they contradict in almost every respect the worldview that has predominated since 1945. Yet, despite this fact, evidence for all ten points is all around us. The church which preaches peace, diversity, equality, and inclusion (The Imperial Altar) is not the same as the church that embarked on the Crusades (The Spark). Conquest, wealth, and education have failed utterly to solve the sorts of maladies that some of the Prophets of Doom were discussing over a hundred years ago: on the contrary, they have accelerated them. Decades of deconstruction and cultural critique have weakened even the remnants of the (already much weakened) social bonds that held the edifice of Western civilisation together during the time of Carlyle. Everywhere, the fox archetype rules through cunning and persuasion, although its tricks look ever more transparent and cruder as the quality of elites has degraded. Quality and distinction are increasingly all but outlawed in a stultifying standardised world that, despite crowing ever more loudly about ‘diversity’, seems to flatten and deaden anything uniquely local and particular under the leaden foot of globalism, once dubbed McWorld.[2] Even as millions of people look on in horror as the social order they have known all their lives seems to collapse around them, even as—as in the case of Brazil in early

2023—millions flood the streets practically begging for a Great Man to grab history by the scruff of the neck, none dare step forward.

The Children of Late Winter cannot embody the Spring: nothing says this more than the sorry image of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro sitting down to enjoy a KFC miles away from crowds he led on and then abandoned. Bolsonaro is a Child of Late Winter, he is made to eat KFC, not play Caesar. Western leaders simply ignore the grim on-the-ground realities of multiculturalism: whether it is mass-grooming gangs in the UK, fire in the streets of Paris, or out-of-control crime in American cities, the political class still bury their ostrich-heads in the sand and pretend that there is no qualitative difference between peoples. Won't someone think of the curry houses. Whether it is Atlanta, London, or Islamabad, their dream in the end is a giant sprawling Milton Keynes with convenient parking and a Starbucks.

Before closing, I would like to touch on four difficult issues that arise out of the preceding discussion, three from Brooks Adams and one from Spengler. As outlined in Chapter 5, Adams believed that the modern age may represent the end of cyclical history. Peter Turchin notably restricts his analysis to 'the agrarian age' and does not range beyond 1900. Let us recall the three reasons that Adams gave for his belief that the cycles would end. First, he argued that modern technology and policing methods put elites 'beyond attack'. Second, he believed that, since the world has been effectively colonised, there are no more 'barbarians' to supply fresh energy. Third, he believed that, since capitalism was now truly global, Asia would eclipse Europe in the long-run owing to their cheaper labour and faster birth rates. Spengler predicts a period of Caesarism which tames the 'money-power'; however, it is not clear if this period is, in fact, already over with the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall representing the last defeats of the Caesars. In other words, has the 'money-power' won indefinitely or are there prospects for more Caesarism?

I will address each of these in turn. The idea that the elites are now untouchable because of technology is highlighted most memorably by the large barbed wire fence that was erected around Washington following the election of Joe Biden as US President, which was disputed and labelled as fraudulent by the incumbent Donald Trump. Whether Biden really received 81 million votes in 2020 is less relevant than the fact that the *idea* of American leaders being in *physical* jeopardy was highlighted by the

iconography of the fences and the media furore over the so-called insurrection on 6th January 2021.

On 30th August 2022, Biden made a barely-veiled threat to his political opponents which again evoked the idea of a violent clash between the government and the 74 million Americans who voted for Trump: 'For those brave right-wing Americans who say [the Second Amendment] is all about keeping America independent and safe, if you want to fight against the country, you need an F-15. You need something a little more than a gun.'[3] This led to a widespread debate which amounted to a real-life discussion of Adams's point: does technology put the elites beyond threat of physical reproach? Without getting into the technicalities of imagining guerrilla fighters in MAGA hats armed with machine guns up against F-15 fighter jets, the answer comes down in the end not to technology but, as it always has done in history, to *will* and what Turchin has called *asabiya* or 'collective solidarity' among elites. If it came down to it, do the American elites have the will to use force on large swathes of the population? In Pareto's terms, this would signal a shift from a fox-led soft managerial regime that relies on persuasion to a lion-led hard managerial regime that relies on force. Even then, when a regime becomes openly coercive, the need for their number to remain determined to stay in power and above all *unified* is even greater. Since Adams was writing, we have seen at least one enormous modern state—the USSR—collapse and many smaller states in the Eastern Bloc likewise fall despite enjoying modern policing methods and technologies. Therefore, we can only conclude that other modern states such as the USA or China might also fall.

Next, Adams argues that there can be no more 'barbarians'. Let us first be clear what we are looking for and recall the distinction Toynbee made between 'mere' barbarians and those groups that trigger The Spark at the start of a new cycle, as seen so many times through history, such as the Macedonians, the Arabs who followed Mohammed, the Mongols, the Mamluks, and so on. Toynbee also provided a model of 'withdrawal' and 'return', later refined and made more elegant by Turchin's Metaethnic Frontier Theory, which accounts for how such tightly knit groups who trigger The Spark come about. They are 'incubated' by relatively hostile conditions behind frontiers, which produce *asabiya*. We have witnessed, in very recent history, the Taliban recapture Afghanistan from the USA. Mountain and desert militias, paramilitary groups, and private military

contractors still exist. Africa has many warlords. North Korea has survived as a 'hermit' state. More complicated arguments may be made for various South American groups, especially in quasi-autonomous regions run by cartels, to provide a potential Spark. Yet more complicated arguments still may be made for the African-American population, who have long faced a series of struggles that has provided them with a feeling of *asabiya* in what many members of the black community see as a hostile environment. The 'frontiers' of 'the hood' or 'the concrete jungle' are very well documented in African-American sub-cultures. What is key to remember is that in almost every case the group that triggers The Spark arrives in a post-collapse environment. It would be a mistake to imagine any of the groups I have listed as 'potentials' to light such a Spark taking on the US military, but rather to imagine conditions after the collapse of Western states.

Adams's next claim that capitalism is now global, and that production would inevitably shift to China and Asia more widely, is undoubtedly true. However, as we have seen, success breeds its own loss conditions. If the East becomes dominant over the West for a period, it too will face decline, it too will face the inevitable effects of luxury, wealth, and so on, while if conditions become once again harsher in Europe or in America, then *asabiya* will increase and new reservoirs of 'spirit' may be found. This may be counter-intuitive, but there is a civilisational mechanism by which 'winning' for a period almost invariably means 'losing' for a period. So, the saying goes, 'hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, weak men create hard times.' While, as we have seen, there is a lot more to cyclical history than this oft-repeated meme, there is also an essential truth to it. However, this does not change the fact that the Malthusian Trap on which Turchin's model rests has been broken, thus it is not clear if population growth leads inextricably to the same breakdown and eventual collapse that he describes. China and India each have over a billion people and their respective states do not seem to be under any immediate threat of collapsing.

Capitalism is also now 'global' such that capital can be shifted around the globe at the touch of a button. The elites are no longer simply governments but a mobile 'anywhere' globalist class who might base themselves in any given city. This book began with just one such elite: the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Whether states still have the power to rein-in capital using force is an open question. It is the question

Vladimir Putin asked the world when he launched his offensive into Ukraine. In the case of China, still under rule by the Chinese Communist Party and the increasingly autocratic Xi Jinping, the state quite clearly still rules over the 'money-power'. However, both states inextricably depend on global trade for their survival. Only the future can tell if the current power of global capital as represented by the Davos class can be overcome.

This brings me to the final question, which is that raised by Spengler's 'Caesarism' and whether the period of the Caesars is now officially over for the West and covered the span roughly from the rise of Napoleon to the death of Franco. We might argue that Putin and Xi, just mentioned, are Caesars, or at the very least strongmen, but neither Russia nor China is part of Western civilisation: in Spengler's terms, they have their own 'culture souls' and their own cycles. In the West, unprecedented hysteria over the prospect of Trump being a fascist proved unfounded, so too with Bolsonaro in Brazil—neither of them is a Caesar, both are more at home eating fast-food and watching sports on television. This does not necessarily mean, however, that some future figure might not be a Caesar. I would not wish to speculate.

However, it is worth stressing that our study has shown that empire is a completely inescapable reality of human life. The independent nation-state is an anomaly, little more than a political fiction. This is relevant because much political chatter since 2016 has cast 'globalists' versus 'nationalists', but it strikes me that 'nationalism' is only ever a short-run phenomenon which takes place in specific circumstances such as during Toynbee's 'withdrawal'. A large nation that can assert its 'nationalism' will seldom go long without developing imperial ambitions. Empires are necessarily multiethnic affairs. They tend to develop universalism as a ruling strategy (The Imperial Altar). As Glubb outlined, the universalism of the empire tends to be designed to welcome in the conquered peoples at the expense of founding stock. All empires sow the seeds of their undoing by degrading the founding stock over time, especially when conquered peoples are invited back to the capital.

'Nationalisms' can emerge in the breakdown of an empire such as, for example, Indian nationalism at the decline of the British Empire. But such nationalisms are not a sign of a renewed spirit of a people—Gandhi does not represent a new Spark for India—but rather a symptom of the weakness of the declining British power. In this regard, 'nationalism' must be seen

almost exclusively in terms of the strength or weakness of the 'American empire', one of the few empires in history that refuses to acknowledge itself as such. A strong German nationalism in this context would be a direct measure of American weakness. The most recent survey, taken by Gallup International in 2015, showed that only 18% of Germans would fight for their country. France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Austria, Portugal, and The Netherlands all polled at less than 30 percent, as compared, for example, with 73 percent of Turks and 59 percent of Russians.[4] I take this as a sign of American strength, although it would be interesting to see how figures may have changed in the years since. It is worth noting that in the same poll nations on the 'frontiers' of the empire—for example, Finland, Greece, Poland, and Ukraine—all have higher ratings. Since they are on the frontier and therefore have geostrategic importance for the USA, these higher ratings must be interpreted as being 'allowed' for these purposes and these purposes only—which is to say that the 'nationalism' in question is anti-Russian or anti-Turkish as opposed to a genuine assertion of national interests as against American interests. The question of American nationalism is of a different stripe since this means 'withdrawal' from empire, which is what Trump's platform offered in-prospect, but which did not deliver —not least because Trump was never truly 'in power'. Caesars in history have seldom if ever been isolationists, they arrive to save *imperial* powers.

This book has shown the possible uses of thinking about history in a distinctly non-progressive and cyclical way. While cyclical history cannot predict the future, it can help us find our bearings. It can give us a sense of 'where we are', why we are facing the issues we face, and how—on a personal as well as political level—we might think about coming to terms with such realities. It can, in a way, 'bring us down to earth': keep us grounded and centred with a view to what is and is not possible. All things must pass: what we have known may fade, Western civilisation may go the way of the Pharaohs, but the world will not end. Fallen powers can also rise again and have done so throughout history. The Persians, as one example, scaled the heights of Cyrus the Great, the Sassanids and, much later, the Safavids, but also suffered humiliations by the Greeks, the Arabs, and the Mongols. Iran is still there, undergoing, as Toynbee might say, a period of 'withdrawal'. Rome has been sacked at least eight times in its history, it's still one of the largest cities in Europe.

We tend to think of any decline as catastrophic, but ‘collapse’ never means ‘the end’. A people who starts to understand itself in civilisational terms, rather than in terms of graphs and spreadsheets, may be better built to endure. The alternative to what I have outlined in this book, which is the belief that things as we have known them since 1945 will continue indefinitely into the future, for 100 years, 500 years, 1,000 years, as GDP goes ‘up and up’ and Progress marches on, should be recognised by all but the most hopelessly utopian reader as being at best wishful thinking, and at worst stupidity.

1 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols. (1922; London: Arktos, 2021), vol. 1, p. 530.

2 Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

3 These remarks by Biden were at a widely reported speech delivered at Wilkes University, PA (30th August 2022).

4 Gallup International, ‘WIN/Gallup International’s Global Survey Shows Three in Five Willing to Fight for Their Country’ (2015): https://gallup.com.pk/bb_old_site/Polls/180315.pdf.

# *Bibliography*

## Primary Authors


Adams, Brooks, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, 2nd edn. (1895; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943).

Carlyle, Thomas, *Sartor Resartus* (1834; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

---, *The French Revolution*, 3 vols. (1837; London: The Folio Society, 1989).

---, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, ed. Michael K. Goldberg (1841; Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

---, *Past and Present*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (1843; Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

---, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, ed. M.K. Goldberg and J.P. Seigel (1850; Ottawa: Canadian Federation for the Humanities, 1983).

---, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H.D. Traill, 30 vols. (1897; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

---, *Historical Essays*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

---, *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. John M. Ulrich, Lowell T. Frye and Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022).

Evola, Julius, *Pagan Imperialism*, trans. Cologero Salvo (1928; Boca Raton, FL: Gornahoor Press, 2017).

---, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (1934; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995).

---, *The Mystery of the Grail: Initiation and Magic in the Quest for the Spirit*, trans. Guido Stucco (1937; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1999).

---, *The Myth of the Blood: The Genesis of Racialism*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (1937; London: Arktos, 2018).

---, *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* (1941; Quimper: Cariou Publishing, 2020).

---, *Men among the Ruins: Post-war Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*, trans. Guido Stucco (1953; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002).

---, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* (1958; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1991).

---, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (1961; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003).

---, *The Path of Cinnabar: The Intellectual Autobiography of Julius Evola*, trans. Sergio Knipe (1963; London: Arktos, 2010).

---, *The Metaphysics of War*, ed. John B. Morgan, 3rd edn. (London: Arktos, 2011).

---, *Fascism Viewed from the Right*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (1974; London: Arktos, 2013).

---, *Notes on the Third Reich*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (1974; London: Arktos, 2013).

---, *A Traditionalist Confronts Fascism*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (London: Arktos, 2015).

---, *The Metaphysics of Power*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (London: Arktos, 2021).

Glubb, John Bagot, *The Course of Empire: The Arabs and Their Successors* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

---, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Stein & Day, 1969).

---, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Story of the Mamluks* (New York: Stein & Day, 1974).

---, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival* (1978; Uckfield: Windmill Press, 2002).

Sorokin, Pitirim A., 'A Survey of the Cyclical Conceptions of Social and Historical Process', *Social Forces*, 6:1 (September 1927), 28–40.

---, *Social & Cultural Dynamics: A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law, and Social Relationships* (1937; New York and London: Routledge, 2017).

Gobineau, Arthur de, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (1855; London: William Heinnemann, 1915).

Spengler, Oswald, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols. (1922; London: Arktos, 2021).

---, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (1931; London: Arktos, 2015).

---, *The Hour of Decision: Germany and World Historical Evolution* (1933; Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2002).

Tainter, Joseph, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

---, 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', *Nature*, 427 (February 2004), 488–489.

Toynbee, Arnold J., 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*', *The Journal of Modern History*, 14:3 (September 1942), 370–372.

---, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, ed. D.C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

---, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes VII–X*, ed. D.C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

---, *Reconsiderations* [*A Study of History: Volume XI*] (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

Turchin, Peter, *Historical Dynamics: Why States Rise and Fall* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

---, *War and Peace and War: The Rise and Fall of Empires* (New York and London: Penguin, 2007).

---, 'Arise Cliodynamics', *Nature*, 454 (2008), 34–35.

---, 'Scientific Prediction ≠ Prophecy', *Cliodynamica* (12 April 2013): https://peterturchin.com/scientific-prediction%e2%89%a0prophecy/.

---, 'The Prophecy of the Fourth Turning', *Cliodynamica* (6 November 2017): https://peterturchin.com/prophecy-fourth-turning/.

---, 'Cliodynamics is Not "Cyclical History"', *Cliodynamica* (18 September 2020): https://peterturchin.com/cliodynamics-is-not-cyclical-history/.

Vico, Giambattista, *The New Science*, ed. and trans. Jason Taylor and Robert Miner (1744; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

---, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. H. Fisch and T.G. Bergin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963).

## Secondary References


*The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

A.J.R., 'Review of Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*', *An Irish Quarterly Review*, 5:18 (June 1916), 310–312.

Aaron, Daniel, 'The Unusable Man: An Essay on the Mind of Brooks Adams', *The New England Quarterly*, 21:1 (March 1948), 3–33.

Archambault, Paul, 'The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World: A Study of Two Traditions', *Revue d' Etudes Augustiniennes Et Patristiques*, 12:3–4 (1966), 193–228.

Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God Against the Pagan*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Bacon, Francis, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Dennan Heath, 14 vols. (1858; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Bagby, Philip, *Culture and History: Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilizations* (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958).

Barber, Benjamin, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

Bardi, Ugi, *The Seneca Effect: Why Growth is Slow but Collapse is Rapid* (New York: Springer, 2017).

Barrett, Eamonn, 'Pepper Spray, Tow Trucks, and Bitcoin Seizures: How Canada Finally Ended the Weeks-Long Freedom Convoy Protests in Ottawa', *Fortune* (21 February 2022): https://fortune.com/2022/02/21/canada-ottawa-freedom-convoy-protest-ends-truckers-arrest-covid-vaccine-mandate/.

Bayer, Thora Ilin, and Donald Phillip Verene, 'Introduction: Interpreting the New Science', in *Keys to the New Science*, ed. Thora

Ilin Bayer and Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 1–14.

Becker, Carl, 'Review of J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*', *The American Historical Review*, 26:1 (October 1920), 304–306.

Bennett, Oliver, *Cultural Pessimism: Narratives of Decline in the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

Benoist, Alain de, *The View from the Right*, trans. Roger Adwan (London: Arktos, 2018).

Benthall, Jonathan, 'Renaissances', *Times Literary Supplement* (14 May 2010), 3–5.

Berlin, Isaiah, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Biddiss, Michael D., *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services, 1970).

---, 'The Neglected (V): Gobineau and the Illusions of Progress', *Government and Opposition*, 19:3 (Summer 1984), 348–366.

Bieri, Dan R., *Brooks Adams and His Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana, 1964), unpublished thesis.

Bittermann, Henry J., 'Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*', *The Philosophical Review*, 51:6 (November 1942), 614–616.

Blackmur, R.P., 'Henry and Brooks Adams: Parallels to Two Generations', *The Southern Review*, 5 (Autumn 1939), 308–334.

Blacam, Aodh de, 'Review of Oswald Spenger, *The Decline of the West*, W.M. Flinders Petire, *The Revolutions of Civilisation* and Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion*', *The Irish Monthly*, 63:746 (August 1935), 539–548.

Blair, Tony, 'Conference Speech 2005', *The Guardian* (27 September 2005):

https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/27/labourconference.speeches.

Blanchflower, David G., and Alex Bryson, 'The Female Happiness Paradox', DoQSS Working Papers 22-0, *Quantitative Social Science* (April 2022): http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp2202.pdf.

Bloom, Robert L., Basil L. Crapster and Harold L. Dunkelberger, 'Toynbee and the Cyclical Pattern of History', *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man* (Gettysburg College, 1958), 17–27.

Bod, Rens, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John, *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke*, 4 vols. (1844; London: Frank Cass and Company, 1967).

Bowden, Jonathan, 'Julius Evola: The World's Most Right-Wing Thinker', in *Extremists: Studies in Metapolitics*, ed. Greg Johnson (San Francisco, CA: Counter-Currents, 2017), 130–157.

Bowersock, G.W., 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 18 (1991), 119–121.

Bradshaw (ed.), Tancred, *The Glubb Reports: Glubb Pasha and Britain's Empire Project in the Middle East 1920–1956* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Brozovic, Danilo, 'Societal Collapse: A Literature Review', *Futures*, 135 (2023), 1–24.

Brown, Jane K., *Goethe's Cyclical Narratives* (Greensboro, NC: University of North Caroline Press, 1975).

Bruce, Andy, and David Millikan, 'UK Inflation Hits 40-Year Record, Highest in G7', *Reuters* (22 June 2022): https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/uk-inflation-hits-91-may-2022-06-22/.

Bruggemann, Walter, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Budryk, Zack, 'Majority in New Poll Worried and Pessimistic About Nation's Future', *The Hill* (19 January 2021): https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/534740-majority-in-new-poll-worried-and-pessimistic-about-nations-future/.

Burnham, James, *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom* (London: Putnam, 1943).

Campbell, T.D., 'Oswald Spengler: The Approaching Death of Western Civilisation', *Futures*, 8:5 (October 1976), 438–443.

Carson, Mina J., 'The Evolution of Brooks Adams', *Biography*, 6:2 (Spring 1983), 95–116.

Cavallier, Andrew, 'Republicans Tear into "Banana Republic" Trump Raid and vow REVENGE in November', *Daily Mail* (9 August 2022): https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11093665.

Chaix-Ruy, Jules-Marie, 'Giambattista Vico', *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 19 (1974), 103–105.

Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, ed. James E.G. Zetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

R.G. Collingwood, 'Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycle', *Antiquity*, 1:3 (September 1927), 311–325.

Coulborn, Rushton, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History*', *The American Historical Review*, 49:1 (October 1943), 77–78.

Cumming, Mark (ed.), *The Carlyle Encyclopaedia* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2004).

Davis, Kathleen, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Dawson, Christopher, *The Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (London: Sheed and Ward, 1957).

DeLaura, David J., 'Carlyle and Arnold: The Religious Issue', in *Carlyle Past and Present: A Collection of New Essays*, ed. K.J. Fielding

and Roger L. Tarr (London: Vision, 1976), 127–155.

Diamond, Jared, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Press, 2005).

DiSanto, Michael, *Criticism of Thomas Carlyle* (Hereford: The Byrnmill Press, 2006).

Donovan, Timothy Paul, *Henry and Brooks Adams: The Search for a Law* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma), unpublished thesis.

Drake, Richard, 'Julius Evola, Radical Fascism, and the Lateran Accords', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 74:3 (July 1988), 403–419.

Dutton, Edward, and J.O.A. Rayner-Hilles, *The Past is a Future Country: The Coming Conservative Demographic Revolution* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2022).

Eggel, Dominic, 'A Civilisation at Peril: Goethe's Representation of Europe during the *Sattelzeit*', *European Review of History*, 21:6 (2013), 871–888.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 'The Literary Work of Thomas Carlyle', *Scribner's Monthly*, 22 (1881), 89–91.

Engels, David, 'Oswald Spengler and the Decline of the West', in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3–22.

Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx, *Marx and Engels: Collected Works*, 30 vols. (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2010).

Ferguson, Niall*, Civilization: The West and the Rest* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

Fortier, Paul A., 'Gobineau and German Racism', *Comparative Literature*, 19:4 (Autumn 1967), 341–350.

Farrenkopf, John, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

Ferraresi, Franco, 'Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right', *European Journal of Sociology*, 28:1 (May 1987), 107–151.

Francis, Samuel T., 'Anarcho-Tyranny—Where Multiculturalism Leads', *VDare* (12th December 2004): https://vdare.com/articles/anarcho-tyranny-where-multiculturalism-leads.

Franco, João, 'Julius Evola, The Prophet of Dormant Empires', in *Protector of the Sacred Flame: Essays on the Life and Thoughts of Julius Evola*, ed. Troy Southgate (Porto: Blackfront Press, 2021), 7–12.

Frye, Northrop, '*The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler', *Daedalus*, 103:1 (Winter 1974), 1–13.

Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

Furlong, Paul, 'Riding the Tiger: Crisis and Political Strategy in the Thought of Julius Evola', *The Italianist*, 31 (2011), 25–40.

Gallon, Robert, 'Latest Figures Show Continued Decline in Marriage Rates', *Prince Family Law* (17 August 2022): https://www.princefamilylaw.co.uk/news/latest-figures-show-continued-decline-in-marriage-rates/.

Gallup International, 'WIN/Gallup International's Global Survey Shows Three in Five Willing to Fight for Their Country' (2015): https://gallup.com.pk/bb_old_site/Polls/180315.pdf.

Gelli, Frank, *Julius Evola: The Sufi of Rome* (Rome: Amazon, 2012).

Geyl, Pieter, 'Toynbee the Prophet: Review of Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History, Vol VII–X*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16:2 (April 1955), 260–274.

---, 'Toynbee's System of Civilizations', in Montagu, 39–72.

Goldberg, Michael, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1972).

Goddard, E.H., and P.A. Gibbons, *Civilisation or Civilisations: An Essay on the Spenglerian Philosophy of History* (New York: Boni &

Liveright, 1926).

Goldingday, John, *The Theology of Jeremiah: The Book, The Message, The Man* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy Press, 2021).

Goldstone, Jack A., *Revolution and Rebellion in Early Modern England* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

Godwin, Joscelyn, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2010).

Gottfried, Paul, *Fascism: The Career of a Concept* (Ithaca, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017).

---, *Antifascism: The Course of a Crusade* (Ithaca, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2021).

Green, Terence, 'Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)', *Philosophy Now*, 127 (August/September 2018): https://philosophynow.org/issues/127/Giambattista_Vico_1668-1744.

Gregor, James A., *The Search for Neofascism: The Use and Abuse of Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Grynbaum, Michael M., John Koblin and Tiffany Hsu, 'TV Networks Shift From Coverage of Electoral Tally to Storming of Capitol', *New York Times* (6 January 2021): https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/business/media/congress-trump-subvert-election-tv.html.

Guénon, René, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Marco Pallis, Arthur Osborne, and Richard C. Nicholson, 4th edn. (1927; Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perrenis, 2001).

---, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne, 4th edn. (1945; Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perrenis, 2001).

Hakl, Hans Thomas, 'Julius Evola and the UR Group', *ARIES*, 12 (2012), 53–90.

Hall, Ian, '"Time of Troubles": Arnold J. Toynbee's Twentieth Century', *International Affairs*, 90:1 (2014), 23–36.

Hardy, Edward Rochie, ‘The Historical Validity of Toynbee’s Approach to Universal Churches’, in *The Intent of Toynbee’s History: A Cooperative Appraisal*, ed. Edward T. Gargan (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1961), 151–180.

Hankins, Frank H., ‘Race as a Factor in Political Theory’, in *A History of Political Theory: Recent Times*, ed. Charles Edward Merriam and Harry Elmer Barnes (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 508–549.

Hansen, H.T., ‘Introduction: Julius Evola’s Political Endeavors,’ in Julius Evola, *Men among the Ruins: Post-war Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*, trans. Guido Stucco (1953; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), 1–104.

Harrison, George, ‘All Things Must Pass’, *All Things Must Pass* (London: EMI, 1970).

Heartfield, James, *Green Capitalism: Manufacturing Scarcity in an Age of Abundance* (London: OpenMute, 2008).

Henderson, Roger D., ‘Vico’s View of History’, *Philosophia Reformata*, 49:2 (February 1984), 97–111.

Hermans, Mark Anthony, *Polybius’s Theory of the Anacyclosis of Constitutions* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1991), unpublished thesis.

Hetherington, H.J.W., ‘Review of Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 26:4 (1916), 557–559.

Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Hirschfield, Charles, ‘Brooks Adams and American Nationalism’, *The American Historical Review*, 69:2 (January 1964), 371–392.

Hiscott, Graham, ‘Return to the Dark Ages’, *Daily Mirror* (7 October, 2022).

Hone, J.M., ‘The Philosophy of Imperialism’, in E. Seillere, *The German Doctrine of Conquest: A French View* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co.,

1914), 1–74.

Hughes, H. Stuart, *An Essay for Our Times* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950).

---, *Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate*, rev. edn. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962).

Hughes, Matthew, 'The Conduct of Operations: Glubb Pasha, the Arab Legion, and the First Arab–Israeli War, 1948–49', *War in History*, (2018), 1–24.

Ikeler, A. Abbott, *Puritan Temper and Transcendental Faith: Carlyle's Literary Vision* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1972).

Jelenko, Edward W., 'Review of John Bagot Glubb, *A Solider with the Arabs*', *Jewish Social Studies*, 21:3 (July 1959), 205–207.

Jevon, Graham, *Glubb Pasha and the Arab Legion: Britain, Jordan, and the End of the Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Joll, James, 'Two Prophets of the Twentieth Century: Spengler and Toynbee', *Review of International Studies*, 11 (1985), 91–104.

Johnson, Greg, *From Plato to Postmodernism* (San Francisco, CA: Counter-Currents, 2019).

Johnston, Barry V., 'Pitirim Sorokin and the American Sociological Association: The Politics of a Professional Society', *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 23 (April 1987), 103–122.

---, 'Pitirim A. Sorokin and Sociological Theory for the Twenty-First Century', *Michigan Sociological Review*, 12 (Fall 1998), 1–23.

Josephson, Matthew, *The President Makers: The Culture of Politics and Leadership in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1896–1916* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940).

Kale, Steven, 'Gobineau, Racism, and Legitimism: A Royalist Heretic in Nineteenth-Century France', *Modern Intellectual History*, 7:1 (April 2010), 33–61.

Kearney, H.F., ‘Arnold Toynbee; Challenge and Response’, *University Review*, 1:4 (Spring 1955), 33–41.

Keate, Noah, ‘Male Suicide Rates at an All-Time High: Why?’, *The Boar* (24 September 2020): https://theboar.org/2020/09/male-suicide-rates-at-an-all-time-high-why/.

Kinney, Jay (ed.), *The Inner West: An Introduction to the Hidden Wisdom of the West* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

Kidd, Ian James, ‘Oswald Spengler, Technology, and Human Nature’, *The European Legacy*, 17:1 (2012), 19–31.

Kirsch, Johann Peter, ‘Millennium and Millenarianism’, in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 10 vols. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), vol. 10, 307–309.

Kuntz, Paul G., ‘Linear of Cyclical Order?: Contrasting Confessions of Augstine, Vico and Joyce’, *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 75:4 (Winter 1992), 517–536.

Lamendola, Francesco, ‘The Last Triumphs of Money and the Machine in Oswald Spengler’s Philosophy of History’, in *Conservative Revolution: Responses to Liberalism and Modernity*, ed. Troy Southgate (London: Black Front Press, 2022), vol. 3, 71–84.

Lammond, D., *Carlyle: Great Lives* (London: Duckworth, 1934).

Lasch, Christopher, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminish Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979).

---, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991).

Lawson, Alex, ‘UK Power Prices Hit Record High Amid Cold Snap and Lack of Wind’, *The Guardian* (11 December 2022): https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/11/uk-power-prices-hit-record-high-amid-cold-snap-and-lack-of-wind-power.

Lea, F.A., *Carlyle: Prophet of To-Day* (1943; London: Routledge, 2017).

Lehman, B.H., *Carlyle's Theory of the Hero: Its Sources, Development, History, and Influence on Carlyle's Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928).

Lewis, Barry, 'Religion and the Church in Geoffrey of Monmouth', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 397–424.

Lewis, Ben, *Oswald Spengler and the Politics of Decline* (New York: Berghahn, 2022).

Lilla, Mark, *G.B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Lunt, James, *Glubb Pasha: A Biography* (London: Harvill Press, 1984).

---, 'Glubb Pasha', *Asian Affairs*, 18:2 (1987), 129–137.

Machiavelli, Niccolò, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (1517; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Madison, Charles A., 'Brooks Adams: Jeremian Critic of Capitalism', *The Antioch Review*, 4:3 (Autumn 1944), 398–413.

Maini, Alessandro, 'On *Historical Dynamics* by Peter Turchin: A Mathematical Review', *Biophysical Economics and Sustainability*, 5:3 (2020), 1–21.

Mansfield, Harvey C., *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (1965; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Marotta, Gary, 'The Economics of American Empire: The View of Brooks Adams and Charles Arthur Conant', *The American Economist*, 19:2 (Fall 1975), 34–37.

Masters, Brooke, 'Blackrock Chief Larry Fink says Ukraine War Marks End of Globalisation', *Financial Times* (24 March 2024): https://www.ft.com/content/0c9e3b72-8d8d-4129-afb5-655571a01025.

McConville, Gordon, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Prophets* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002).

McKinnon, Andrew, 'Christians, Muslims and Traditional Worshippers in Nigeria: Estimating the Relative Proportions from Eleven Nationally Representative Social Surveys', *Review of Religious Research*, 63 (2021), 303–315.

McNeill, William H., *Arnold Toynbee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Mildred, James, 'The Startling Decline of Marriage: How Worried Should We Be?', *CARE* (2018): https://care.org.uk/cause/marriage-and-family/the-startling-decline-of-marriage-how-worried-should-we-be.

Mises, Ludwig von, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949).

Montagu, A.F. Ashley (ed.), *Toynbee and History: Critical Essays and Reviews* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1956).

Moore, Wilbert E., 'Pitirim A. Sorokin 1889–1968', *The American Sociologist*, 3:2 (May 1968), 158–159.

Morris, Benny, *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine and the Jews* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

Morton, S. Fiona, *The Bibliography of Arnold J. Toynbee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Mosca, Gaetano, *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur Livingston, trans. Hannah D. Khan (1895; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).

Mosse, George L., *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (1978; Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020).

Murray, Douglas, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Nagel, Paul C., 'Brooks Adams after Half a Century', *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 90 (1978), 38–57.

Nale, John, 'Arthur de Gobineau on Blood and Race', *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 2:1 (2014), 106–124.

Navari, Cornelia, ‘Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975): Prophecy and Civilization’, *Review of International Studies*, 26:2 (April 2000), 289–301.

Nelson, Hubert Wayne, *Kykloi: Cyclical Theories in Ancient Greece* (Portland, OR: Portland State University, 1980), unpublished thesis.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Guess and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (1872; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

O’Meara, James J., *Mysticism After Modernism: Crowley, Evola, Neville, Watts, Colin Wilson, & Other Populist Gurus* (Colac: Manticore Press, 2018).

Otto of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146AD*, ed. Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Parvini, Neema, *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

---, *Shakespeare and New Historicist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

---, *Shakespeare’s Moral Compass* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

---, *The Defenders of Liberty: Human Nature, Individualism, and Property Rights* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

---, *The Populist Delusion* (Perth: Imperium Press, 2022).

---, ‘Remembering Thomas Carlyle’, *Chronicles* (July 2022), 18–21.

Perrin, Robert G., ‘Sorokin’s Concept of Immanent Change’, in *Sorokin & Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*, ed. Joseph P. Ford, Michel P. Richard and Palmer C. Talbutt (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 105–124.

Persons, Stow, ‘The Cyclical Theory of History in Eighteenth Century America’, *American Quarterly*, 6.2 (Summer 1954), 147–163.

Petrie, W.M. Flinders, *The Revolutions of Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

Pierce, Donald J., 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*', *Political Science Quarterly*, 58:3 (September, 1943), 437–438.

Pickard, Jim, 'Most Britons Pessimistic About the Future, Survey Finds', *Financial Times* (31 December 2021): https://www.ft.com/content/08d13d12-2a96-4020-88c9-eb5fb666559a.

Pinker, Steven, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking Books, 2011).

Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Pompa, Leon, *Vico's Theory of the Causes of Historical Change* (1971; London: IFS Publishing, 2019).

---, *Vico: A Study of the 'New Science'*, 2nd edn. (1975: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Robbins, Lionel, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd edn. (1932; London: Macmillan, 1935).

Roosevelt, Theodore, 'Review of Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*', *The Forum*, 22:5 (January 1897), 575–589.

---, 'The New Nationalism' (31 August 1910), in *The Selected Speeches and Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Gordon Hunter (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 85–102.

Rose, Matthew, *A World After Liberalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

Rosenberg, Philip, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Rosenberg, John D., *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

Rosenmeyer, Thomas G., 'Hesiod and Historiography', *Hermes*, 85:3 (November 1953), 257–285.

Rousselle, Robert, 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*', *The Classical World*, 83:6 (July–August 1990), 542–543.

Royle, Trevor, *Glubb Pasha: The Life and Times of Sir John Bagot Glubb, Commander of the Arab Legion* (London: Abacus, 1992).

Rule, James B., 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*', *Population and Environment*, 11:1 (Fall 1989), 72–74.

Rule, John C., and Barbara Stevens Crosby, 'Bibliography of Works on Arnold J. Toynbee, 1946–1960', *History and Theory*, 4:2 (1965), 212–233.

Russell, James C., *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Ryan, Richard M. (ed.), *The Human Handbook of Motivation*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Schapiro, J. Salwyn, 'Thomas Carlyle, Prophet of Fascism', *The Journal of Modern History*, 7.2 (June 1945), 97–115.

Schmidt, Emily, Craig Helmstetter and Benjamin Clary, 'Most Americans Think Liberty has Waned, Rights Will Further Diminish', *APM Research Labs* (30 June 2022): https://www.apmresearchlab.org/motn/what-americans-think-about-liberty-rights-freedom-may-2022.

Schrodt, Philip A., 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', *Contemporary Sociology*, 34:2 (March 2005), 312–314.

Sedgwick, Mark, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Seigel, Jules Paul (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage* (1971; New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

Sheehan, Thomas, 'Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist', *Social Research*, 48:1, On Violence: Paradoxes

and Antinomies (Spring 1981), 45–73.

Shotwell, James T., ‘Spengler’, in *The Faith of An Historian and Other Essays: An Anthology* (New York: Walker and Company, 1964), 221–229.

Simpson, Richard L., ‘Pitirim Sorokin and His Sociology’, *Social Forces*, 32:2 (December 1953), 120–131.

Slaboch, Matthew W., *The Road to Nowhere: The Idea of Progress and Its Critics* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

Smith, Annette J., ‘Of Termites and Men or the Politics of Gobineau’, *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, 4:1 (January 1981), 73–83.

Sowell, Thomas, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, rev. edn. (1987; New York: Basic Books, 2007).

Spengler, Joseph J., ‘Review of Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*’, *Southern Economic Journal*, 4:4 (April 1938), 474–477.

Sperry, E.E., ‘Review of Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*’, *The American Historical Review*, 32:4 (July 1927), 826–828.

Spring, Gerald M., *The Vitalism of Count de Gobineau* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1932).

Stephenson, Carl, *Medieval Feudalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943).

Stern, Amory, ‘Faust without Mephistopheles: Oswald Spengler and the German Philosophy of Science’, in *Conservative Revolution: Responses to Liberalism and Modernity*, ed. Troy Southgate (London: Black Front Press, 2022), vol. 2, 35–54.

Strietelmeier, Zachary A., ‘Remembering the Middle Ages’, *Tenor of Our Times*, 2 (Spring 2013), 58–68.

Stoddart, Michelle, ‘Nation’s Capital Being Turned into “Fortress Washington” Ahead of Inauguration’, *ABC News* (14 January 2021): https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/nations/story?id=75259761.

Strauss, William, and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997).

Stromberg, Roland N., 'A Study of History and a World at War: Toynbee's Two Great Enterprises', in *Toynbee: Reappraisals*, ed. C.T. McIntire and Marvin Perry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 141–159.

Talbutt, Palmer C., 'Sorokin's Challenge to Modernity', in *Sorokin & Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*, ed. Joseph P. Ford, Michel P. Richard and Palmer C. Talbutt (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 65–82.

Tarr, Rodger L., *Thomas Carlyle: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

Taylor, Kenneth B., 'The Passing of Western Civilization', *Futures*, 122 (2020), 1–9.

Teitelbaum, Benjamin R., *War for Eternity: The Return of Traditionalism and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York and London: Penguin, 2020).

Tennyson, G.B., *Sartor Called Resartus* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1965).

Thompson, Kenneth W., 'Toynbee's Approach to History Reviewed', *Ethics*, 65:4 (July 1955), 287–303.

Trela, D.J. and Rodger L. Tarr (eds.), *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).

Trevor-Roper, Hugh, 'Arnold Toynbee's Millennium', in *Men and Events: Historical Essays* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 299–324.

Trigger, Bruce G., 'Review of Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Civilizations*', *Man*, 24:2 (June 1989), 374–375.

Trompf, G.W., *The Idea of Recurrence in Western Thought: From Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1979).

Turis, Gianfranco de, *Julius Evola: The Philosopher and Magician at War: 1943–5*, trans. Eric Dennis Antonius Galati (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2020).

Vanden Bossche, Chris R. *Carlyle and the Search for Authority* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991).

van der Dussen, Jan, 'Toynbee and His Critics', in *Studies on Collingwood, History and Civilization* (New York and London: Springer, 2016), 169–196.

Verene, Donald Phillip, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's 'New Science' and 'Finnegan's Wake'* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Vijn, J.P., *Carlyle and Jean Paul: Their Spiritual Optics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1982).

Wald, Shalom Solomon, *Rise and Decline of Civilizations: Lessons for the Jewish People* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014).

Waring, Walter, *Thomas Carlyle* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1978).

Watts, Steven, *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

Weigert, Hans W., 'Oswald Spengler, Twenty-Five Years After', *Foreign Affairs*, 21:1 (October 1942), 120–131.

Whitehouse, Harvey, *et al.*, 'Testing the Big Gods Hypothesis with Global Historical Data: A Review and "Retake"', *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (June 2022), 1–43.

Wickham, Alex, and Rachel Morison, 'UK Braces for Blackouts, Gas Cuts in January Emergency Plan', *Bloomberg* (9 August 2022): https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-09/uk-braces-for-blackouts-gas-cuts-in-january-in-emergency-plan.

Williams, William A., 'Brooks Adams and American Expansion', *The New England Quarterly*, 25:2 (June 1952), 217–232.

Wilson, David Sloan, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Wilson, Francis, 'Back with a Vengeance', *The Spectator* (11 March 2017): https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/back-with-a-vengeance.

Wolff, Elisabetta Cassina, 'Evola's Interpretation of Fascism and Moral Responsibility', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50:4–5 (2016), 478–494.

Zhao, Dingxin, 'Review of Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*', *American Journal of Sociology*, 112:1 (July 2006), 308–310.

# Also Available

# Freedom's Progress?

## *A History of Political Thought*

Gerard Casey